

ToyNews

Issue 159 • March 2015

Retail • Licensing • Pre-School • Marketing



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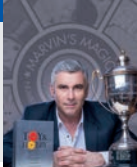
ToyNews

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Geared for take-off



Drones are rapidly becoming the fastest growing category in the remote control toy market. Ideal for in-store theatrics, we look at how retailers can prepare themselves for the lift-off of this innovative sector



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NewBay Media is a member of the
Periodical Publishers Associations

AUDITED CIRCULATION:
Average Net Circulation: **6,092**
July 2013 to June 2014.

■ ToyNews circulation is **17.1%** higher
than its closest competitor

■ ToyNews has **100%** named
circulation and 0% duplication.

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COMMENT

Flying high



The growth of the
drones category
has been a key
talking point so
far this year -
helped in part by
more accessible
price points.

AFTER THE traditional whirlwind start to the year, the industry is now back at its collective desk and - hopefully - working the way through a mountain of positive follow ups from the shows.

I thought the quality of product on display at each of the four events I attended this year was exceptional. Some of the best I've seen for a long while, in fact.

The growth of the drones category was probably the main talking point, thanks mostly to the price becoming much more accessible, and meaning retailers are much more likely to stock them.

From the Bladez Mycropodz range through to the voice control unit available at Flying Gadgets, up to the 'ultimate flying camera' from Parrot, the sector seems to have hit that sweet spot at the moment and should enjoy a strong year. Find out more about the lines available in our special feature from page 21.

Some of the team's other favourites across the four venues included Razor's Crazy Cart XL, Mega Bloks Buildable Minion, Spin Master's Meccanoid, Star Wars Timeline from Esdevium, LEGO Bionicles and new LEGO Scooby-Doo lines, Sbyke, MiPosaur, plus Marvin's iMagic.

In New York, the action figures, 'pop stop' and tech aisles seemed to attract the most visitors, showing the importance of the sectors to US retailers at the moment. My three stand outs I saw at the Javits though have to be MOFF - which looks like little more than an orange wristband, but is in fact a wearable smart toy that turns imagination into sounds; Hasbro's Raptor Claws and Dino Head Hand Puppet, just for sheer imaginative play value; and the new levitating doll addition to Mattel's Monster High collection (I'm still trying to figure it out).

With the industry having enjoyed a four per cent boost in 2014, how we can now match - or even better this - in 2015 is the key question. Encouragingly, while there are no doubt some tremendous licences out there, we also have a swathe of original, innovative product for retailers to get their teeth into across the year.

Samantha Loveday
sloveday@nbmedia.com



High profile brands to drive Mega Bloks in 2015

Mega Bloks expecting strong year with Minions, Monster High and new additions to the First Building range

By Billy Langsworthy

HAVING ENJOYED its first toy fair season as part of Mattel, Mega Bloks is looking forward to a success 2015 thanks to brands including *Minions*, Mattel's *Monster High* and *Terminator: Genisys*.

As a result of last year's acquisition, the brand now boasts a Fisher-Price endorsed pre-school line that will see the First Builders range welcome new additions this year, including the Block Scooping Wagon.

"As a member of the Mattel family, Mega now has access to worldwide consumer insight that drives product development, enhanced marketing strength to promote its portfolio of leading brands, and a global distribution network to bring construction to families around the world," Pete Fuller, marketing manager, EuRoMEA, Mattel UK, told *ToyNews*.

"Combining Mattel's strengths with Mega's expertise in construction establishes the ultimate launch pad for maximising the potential of powerhouse properties in the construction category."

The firm is welcoming ranges based on some of this year's most anticipated movies in *Terminator: Genisys* and *Minions*.

"This year, with the release of the highly anticipated *Minions* movie hitting screens in May, fans of all ages will be excited to find brand new *Minions* construction sets, which will include over 65 buildable Minion characters, inviting children to collect, build and play out their favourite adventures of Kevin, Dave, and Bob," added Fuller.

"*Terminator: Genisys* will be a great extension to the popular Mega Bloks Collectors construction series, which currently features some of the world's top video game franchises.

"Launching this fall to align with the release of the box office film, Mega Bloks' *Terminator Genisys* sets will be for the collectors fanbase who love the movie's original content, which will be brought to life through highly detailed construction sets and articulated micro action figures."



As the firm celebrates 30 years in the construction sector, Mega Bloks believes its new additions will help 2015 go down as another successful year.

"Whether it be our award-winning and Fisher-Price endorsed pre-school line, the extension of our girls portfolio with one of Mattel's leading brands, our new box office movie licensees for boys, or the expansion of our popular collectors construction series, Mega Bloks has something new and exciting to offer every member of the family," concluded Fuller.

Mega Bloks:
01628 500 000

Wild Science is in "good hands" with Flair

Firm claims it's a perfect fit for the likes of Perfume Studio and Weird Slime Workshop

By Billy Langsworthy

FLAIR HAS made the move into the science market with the acquisition of the Wild Science brand.

The firm claims the brand, featuring products like Perfume Studio, Bath Bomb Studio and Weird Slime Workshop, is a good fit for Flair's expertise.

"For many years GP Flair has been one on the most successful creators and distributors of creative kits in the UK market," Nic Aldridge, marketing director at Flair, told *ToyNews*.

"Science kits, while a different sector, have a similar audience and purpose and the company has wanted to further the choice for our retail partners for some time.

"The most important thing however, was to have a brand that was right for the company and Wild Science is perfect for us. These kits are fun and balance creativity

equally with the learning about science. Therefore, when we were presented with the opportunity to be UK distributors we didn't have to think twice."

Looking ahead, Flair is confident it has the tools to grow the brand following positive feedback at Toy Fair.

"We like moving into categories when we can make a strong statement with a well-known brand," added Aldridge.

"We received some incredibly positive feedback about the new kits that are to launch in autumn which will offer kids a lot more choice.

"Most of all retailers know that with Flair, Wild Science is in good hands and will grow into the formidable and sought after brand that it should be."

Flair: 0208 643 0320



Displays the key to collectables success, says Panini

Company believes a committed in-store display can provide "an invaluable incremental revenue stream for retailers."

By Billy Langsworthy

PANINI BELIEVES a dedicated approach to in-store displays is key to making a success of collectables.

The firm believes shops that commit to a range of collectables can look forward to an "invaluable incremental revenue stream".

"In-store displays are crucial to establishing revenues from collectables," Jess Tadmor, Panini's head of marketing, told *ToyNews*.

"Of retailers that index above the average, all will look at dedicated space in store, even if this is for a few weeks around the key launch period. Also ensuring the collection is stocked for the full on sale period is beneficial.

"It's worth mentioning the significant handling gains we experience with a 'hot collection'. Even if just a small number went on to establish a dedicated collectable range, this could offer an invaluable incremental revenue stream for retailers."

With a big year of movies ahead, Panini says it has all the major releases covered, as well as properties like *Frozen* and some popular pre-school selections.

Tadmor added: "As a Disney licensee, we support both evergreen properties and theatrical film releases.

"We're then placed to develop those properties that go on to become established, such as *Frozen*.

"We ensure we offer a wide range of collection

for differing age groups, thereby moving away from just the traditional primary age range, by introducing a wide number of pre-school collections.

"All are designed to be educational and immersive for children.

"With pre-school collections we need to market to parents as opposed to children, which often requires investment in TV advertising to get our launch message across."

Panini: 01892 500105



Re:creation readies plush push in 2015

Snuggables umbrella brand to welcome new lines as firm details plans to expand into soft toy aisle

By **Samantha Loveday**

RE:CREATION IS looking to shake up the plush aisle this year, with its new Snuggables umbrella brand set to expand further following a strong start last year.

The firm launched its first new plush lines in years in 2014 with Stretchkins and Bright Light Pillow. Both of these brands will be added to in 2015. Stretchkins has a

new Purple Pony character, plus a new Pink Cat which will incorporate a light up feature to add another

dimension of play. Meanwhile, Bright Light Pillow will benefit from the addition of a Star shaped pillow.

Meanwhile, Zigamazooos were unveiled at Toy Fair – eight plush characters which each have an infectious giggle when squeezed – along with Neck Napperz, four huggable animal friends that transform to become a comfy neck pillow.

The Snuggables umbrella brand logo will feature consistently across all plush brand communications as Re:creation continues to build awareness. Each of the four brands will be backed with heavyweight

TV, as well as PR and online programmes targeting parents and children.

"It's been a number of years since we have had a presence in the plush aisle but, as we saw from results last year, we are able to deliver on innovation in plush outside of electronic feature plush and licensed lines," Jonathan Kirkley, Re:creation's marketing director, explained to *ToyNews*. "The products we have introduced have a desirability that fires consumers' imaginations."

"Stretchkins were a truly hot product at the end of last year, with consumer reviews and word of mouth among parents amplifying results seen from our TV advertising."

Kirkley continued: "Based on NPD data, we're confident

that we're making a positive contribution to a category that is in growth. Coupled with innovative, quality product, our expertise in marketing can build strong brands and drive consumer demand.

"While 2015 will focus on maximising the potential of our four Snuggables brands at retail, we're always on the look out for the next innovation in plush."

Re:creation: 0118 973 9487



Thumbs up once again for Nuremberg's British Pavilion

Organiser reports an increase in exhibitors for 2015 • Plans are already well underway for 2016

By **Samantha Loveday**

THE ORGANISER of the British Pavilion at Nuremberg Toy Fair is once again celebrating a successful show, with the number of UK exhibitors taking advantage of the space up to 36 in 2015.

While rebooking forms for 2016 have yet to be released, verbal confirmation has been taken from 31 out of the 36 saying they will be back.

Two of the exhibitors – Charlie Bears and Ventura – will be moving on to take larger spaces in halls which suit their product, while the remaining companies are yet to confirm.

"We had fantastic feedback, as expected," said Stuart Whitehill, account director for the Overseas Fairs Division of the UKTI.

"New distributors appointed, orders taken from existing and new customers, plus a truly global attendance with one firm saying they had met with visitors from every corner of the globe except Germany."

Planning for next year is already underway, with Whitehill explaining they are waiting for the pavilion location to be confirmed by Spielwarenmesse and its area agreed before contacting existing exhibitors.

"We will also contact any UK companies who have asked to join the pavilion. We are keen to ensure that each year the UK pavilion can accommodate new companies so that its overall appearance and content does not become repetitive and uninspiring."

"I like to think that we achieve this every time the doors open on the first day of the show."

Whitehill also says that he is exploring the possibility of a UK Toy Innovation/Excellence area where UK toy companies which have never experienced the show can look to present their

products and ideas for the first time.

However, he points out: "They will be told that this show is not something that they can do just once. It needs long

haul commitment – the seasoned UK exhibitors who attend year on year will all agree that once established, results improve year on year."

UKTI: 01564 784999



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Anki sets sights on best year yet with Overdrive

"2014 was a great year but 2015 is going to be very different"



By Billy Langsworthy

ANKI HAS unveiled the next generation of its battle-racing toy/video game hybrid in Anki Overdrive, and the firm believes it will help it to its biggest year yet.

Overdrive, set to launch in the UK, US and Germany this September, boasts state-of-the-art modular tracks, high-end car designs and new innovations in gameplay, all of which point to a strong 2015.

"2015 will definitely be better than 2014 for us," Anki co-founder Hanns Tappeiner told *ToyNews*.

"We'll be in a lot more stores and the product is so much better than what

Anki Overdrive's easy to link modular tracks allow players to build their own battle-race courses within seconds, and pit their real-life robotic supercars against friends or enemy AI commanders and their crews in the game's campaign mode.

Anki believes the customisable tracks of Overdrive will benefit retailers looking to entice consumers into their stores with in-store theatre and the next hit collectable.

"It's the same for retailers as it is for players," said Tappeiner. "Players can build whatever track they want at home, retailers can build whatever they feel fits into their stores. They can also break it down and rebuild it whenever they feel like it.

it even better for people wanting to collect the cars. There will be six cars available from launch and more available over time."

Overdrive is the latest generation of Anki, and the firm believes this approach aligns it more with video game firms that constantly update and launch new titles alongside the latest tech.

"There is so much technology in Anki Overdrive that allows us to bring out something completely new, and potentially change the branding," added Tappeiner.

And while app toys have, in the past, been criticised by parents conscious of their child's screen time, Tappeiner believes Overdrive centres around physical play.

"Ours is the inverse of any app toy I can think of," stated Tappeiner.

"We use the mobile phones as the controller and we use phones due to their processing power.

"Without phones or tablets, we couldn't do what we're doing, but our UX and UI designers are pretty much spending all of their time trying to figure out how to never force somebody to look at the screen.

"If you actually watch people play Anki Drive, they never look at the screen."

Anki: 01236 222054

The love for cars is such a cross-generational thing that we really think this is something that is going to be around for a very, very long time.

Hanns Tappeiner, Anki

it was. 2014 was a great year, but 2015 is going to be very different.

"We're not trying to design a hit for one year. The love for cars is such a cross-generational thing that we really think this is something that is going to be around for a very, very long time."

"Collectability was one of the biggest questions we've faced since launch. People were telling us they wanted to collect the cars and they wanted more cars.

"In Overdrive, there is a much greater level of detail with the cars. It makes

Magic Box turns eyes to toy retail for Zomlings

Series three has just launched, with series four already planned for autumn

By Samantha Loveday

MAGIC BOX is forecasting sales for the first 12 months for its Zomlings brand to be almost five million units in the UK – and now the firm is really pushing hard to make an even bigger impact at toy retail.

The collectable line launched in March 2014, with Magic Box securing a wide distribution between news and the magazine sector, as well as the toy trade.

Magic Box believes that each item in the Zomlings range has a unique element that is not available elsewhere, with the prices all extremely competitive.

"It can be difficult to persuade retailers to support a brand new collectable IP," Ben Harper, UK & Ireland director at Magic Box, tells *ToyNews*.

"We are certainly trying hard to get the message across about the success



and longevity of Zomlings and we are developing lines specifically built to suit toy stores. We are also very happy to supply toy retailers with FSDUs to allow them to display Zomlings in a prominent and logical way."

Magic Box: 01403 251286

Whirligig nails expansion with 'make and do' success

By Robert Hutchins

INDIE RETAILER Whirligig is expanding across the South East, with the successful launch of a second store and plans to open a third before Christmas.

The Brighton-based toy shop aims to have a network of stores across the region, offering children a traditional alternative to the offering of big name retailers.

Whirligig opened its doors in October 2012 when Peter Allinson noticed a gap in the market to deliver 'unique, traditional toys' such as wooden 'make and do' kits, model making and more to kids aged five to 15.

In October 2014, Allinson opened a second Whirligig branch in Chichester, where local reaction

has reportedly been "phenomenal".

"We found the location right in the city centre, there is nobody doing what we are doing here and the reaction has been absolutely amazing," Allinson told *ToyNews*.

"We want to build a small network that really focuses on quality toys, and with any new stores we open, we will absolutely maintain that Whirligig theme.

"We work with lots of small suppliers, start-ups and one-man bands, and seek out unusual brands to sell."

Whirligig: 01273 693241



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Business as usual at 'buzzing' Olympia

BTHA has been praised by exhibitors and visitors alike for another 'terrific', 'vibrant' and 'brilliant' show



By **Samantha Loveday**

THE BTHA has been roundly praised by Toy Fair exhibitors for the solid success of this year's show, and for the way the organisation has dealt with the 2016 date clash with Nuremberg.

Exhibitors and visitors alike were vociferous in their appreciation for the Hammersmith-based event, with words including 'terrific', 'buzzing', 'vibrant', 'brilliant', 'well attended' and 'ticks along perfectly' being used to describe it.

The BTHA itself was also happy with how the event performed, with head of Toy Fair operations and sales, Majen Immink, telling ToyNews that visitor numbers were on a par with 2014.

"Overall we had another great show having maxed out our space once again, which allowed us to welcome a number of brand new exhibitors, as well as continue a strong showing

of returnees," she said.

"The show looked fantastic thanks to the efforts of the exhibitors, stand designers and wider teams.

"On the whole feedback has been really positive from our exhibitors. The opening day was particularly busy and people commented on the calibre of visitors once again. As ever, we will be listening to all feedback with a view to making changes and improvements for next year."

One of the changes, of course, will be the date, after it was revealed that the original timing for 2016 would have meant a clash with Nuremberg.

As ToyNews went to press, the BTHA had issued a statement to members and exhibitors saying that it was likely Toy Fair 2016 would run from Sunday, January 24th to Tuesday, January 26th, pending final confirmation from Olympia.

"Extra opening hours are planned on the first two days and build time is being arranged to allow for a comfortable schedule for contractors to create a great event," Roland Earl,

director general of the BTHA, said.

Date issues aside, feedback from this year's show suggests that the BTHA has got it spot on with the logistics of the fair. The only

slight niggles when we asked the industry for feedback were directed towards the food options available at the venue, while some thought the 6pm closing on the final day needed readjusting.

TOY INDUSTRY AWARD WINNERS 2014

Independent Toy Retailer of the Year: Toys N Tuck
Specialist Multiple Toy Retailer of the Year (up to 5 stores): Ken Black Toys & Nursery
Specialist Multiple Toy Retailer of the Year (up to 30 stores): Toy Barnhaus
Specialist Multiple Toy Retailer of the Year (over 30 stores): Smyths Toys
General Multiple Toy Retailer of the Year: Morleys Stores
Online Toy Retailer of the Year: The Entertainer
Overall Toy Retailer of the Year: Smyths Toys
Craze: Loom Bands, Character Options & H Grossman
Construction: The LEGO Movie, LEGO
Action Figure: Ninja Turtles Movie Figures, Flair
Gaming: Minecraft Figures, Character Options
Doll: Disney Frozen Sparkle Dolls, Mattel
Interactive: Little Live Pets Birds, Character Options
Collectable: Shopkins, Flair
Craft: Sew Cool Sewing Studio, Spin Master
Pre-school: Toot-Toot, VTech
Innovative Toy of the Year: My Friend Cayla, Vivid
Licence: Frozen, Disney
Special Recognition Award: Rubie's Masquerade
Supplier of the Year: Character Options
Toy of the Year: Disney Frozen Snow Glow Elsa, Jakks Pacific (pictured)



WHAT THE INDUSTRY THOUGHT

"Another exciting year at Toy Fair saw existing customers come back to our stand – they always eagerly await the showcasing of over 50 new products. Toy Fair is a very important show for Learning Resources, as we continue to increase growth in the retail sector this event is becoming a key meeting point for developing new business."

Chris Beardmore
UK Trade Retail Sales
Manager,
Learning Resources



"Re:creation had a fantastic show and a great reception

for our new plush brands. There was a real buzz of optimism from our key customers and the Razor Crazy Cart was attracting a lot of new customers after a successful launch in the UK. A great start to another year."

Adrian Mayes,
General Sales Manager,
Re:creation



"What a fantastic first Toy Fair. The support for our new range was just

incredible. We made some great contacts with retailers and distributors, and now can't wait to see the toys hit the shops later this year."

Leith Moghli
CEO, Anagranimals



"Our stand was extremely busy throughout the show and we were

particularly pleased to have so much positive feedback from independents keen to either expand their K'Nex product range or stock it for the first time."

Paul Fogarty
MD, K'Nex UK

"There was a real buzz of positivity in the air, we had a packed schedule seeing everyone we wanted to see with a great response across all our ranges. We are very much looking forward to 2016, it will be here before we know it."

Mark Hunt
Marketing Manager,
Character Options



"Brilliant. It exceeded our high expectations, our stand was constantly

busy and we had fantastic feedback from all the buyers."

Dave Williams
VP Sales, UK,
Wooky Europe

"I wouldn't change anything, I love it as it is. It's great to catch up with all my buyers, new and old, and it's good to have a chance to speak to your friends to get their thoughts on happenings around the industry. It sets up your year perfectly."

Tony Mace
Senior National Account
Manager, Rainbow Designs



"It's an incredibly important show for us. Not only do we see our buyers

and show them updates on our products and even some new late arrivals, but it is a chance to see the more senior people from our retail partners who might not have been able to come to previews at our offices. We had an exceptionally good show."

Mary Wood
Marketing Director, Vivid



"It still had all the buzz and vibrancy that is such a strong part of the UK Toy Fair. It

was great to see some of the big boys back again, as well as more international

visitors. I am not sure 6pm closing on Thursday is justified as most visitors have left by then."

Trudi Bishop,
Head of Marketing &
Licensing, Cartamundi



"We had a fantastic Toy Fair as we had opened up our existing stand space

to showcase all the new distribution lines we are launching in 2015. There was a real buzz about the stand throughout the whole show and the new ranges were brilliantly received."

Nikki Samuels
Director, Sambro



"A terrific show. It's always a great success for Galt – that's why we return year on

year, and we're delighted with the interest we have received in all our toy ranges, both old favourites and new products. We are now very optimistic about the year ahead."

John McDonnell
MD, Galt Toys



"We find Toy Fair is well organised and well attended – it's the perfect

space for us to meet with existing customers, showcase our range to new ones and also to generate excitement and interest around the new tech we're bringing to market. I don't think there's anything I'd change."

Josh Farleigh
MD, Flying Gadgets



"Toy Fair was hugely successful for VTech this year. We received a very positive

to replicate the successes in future years."

Clive Richardson
Marketing Director, VTech

"Winning awards for Shopkins and Turtles was definitely the highlight. Other exhibition halls stay open later during set up times, only on the last day do we seem to be able to stay as late as we want. It would really help our exhibition company if there was not a curfew."

Susan Journeaux
Marketing Services
Manager, Flair



"The whole show was great, but winning Stand of the Year was a real

achievement for us. Children are integral to the industry, so I think it would be great if those who took part in the demo zone came to each stand and gave feedback on the products, and voted for their favourites."

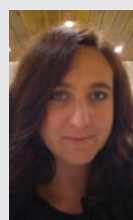
Sally Carnall
Marketing Manager, Epoch
making toys



"Toy Fair ticks along perfectly, so other than opening the debate about a

fourth day, and also hoping that the Olympia catering may improve one day, there isn't anything I can think of where the BTHA could do anything better. We are very committed to being part of Toy Fair for 2016 and for many years to come."

Vicki Elmer
Product Manager/Media
Planner, Bandai



"Toy Fair 2015 will go down in memory as one of the most enjoyable and successful shows I was lucky enough

to attend. There was a

real buzz in the air and our stand was absolutely teeming with energy."

Corneé Marlow
Marketing Services
Coordinator, Ravensburger

"We loved our new location on the ground floor and were really busy all three days. It's the most fantastic showcase for your brands and you get to interact with retailers, licensors, trade and consumer press, media, PR, product designers and lots of good friends."

Lindsay Hardy
Marketing Director,
Trends UK

"Toy Fair 2015 was great for Thames and Kosmos. We were in a new location, we had lots of new product launches and we also previewed our first ever TV ad. And the food at Olympia was much better this year."

Emma Hanlon
Account Manager,
Thames and Kosmos



"Three busy days for us, but many said it was quieter than last

year. However, our stand was extremely busy."

Malcolm Evans,
Founder, Kids@Play



"The opportunity to have detailed discussions on substantive matters

with other games companies was invaluable. We received some very positive responses and, on balance, some useful critique. Without exhibiting, we wouldn't have been exposed to this, which has allowed us to redesign components of the game and our business approach to address those concerns."

Graeme Fraser-Bell,
CEO,
Accentuate Games

New York times

It may be the final stop of the toy trade show calendar, but a visit to the US Toy Fair is well worth the near 4,000 miles and sub zero temperatures. **Samantha Loveday** reveals her highlights from the show



IT'S DIFFICULT to explain just how to-the-bone cold it was in New York City. No doubt the fashion pack - who were in town for NY Fashion Week at the same time as the toy crowd - were advocating layering, but when you're faced with -16 and lower, not even this has much impact.

Good job then, that the Javits not only had the heating on, but was also packed full of some of the hottest new toy launches of the year (see what I did there?). Terrible puns aside, nearly 25,000 visitors checked out 1,064 exhibitors across a record breaking 421,300 net square feet of exhibition space across the four days of the show.

Over 9,000 retail buyers - including delegations from 22 of the nation's top toy

sellers - attended, while close to 5,000 unique retail outlets were represented. The top five countries represented by the most buyers were Canada, the UK, Mexico, Japan and Hong Kong.

The show also saw a four per cent increase in licensors, with execs from 20th Century Fox, Disney, DreamWorks, Nickelodeon and Warner among others walking the halls.

Crucially, for those of us who had already taken in Hong Kong, London, Germany and Birmingham, there were a lot of new products in the mix that I hadn't yet seen.

Carter Keithley, president and CEO of show organiser the TIA, comments: "This year's attendees told us that they enjoyed a busy, successful and exciting

show teeming with the best and brightest new toys and games of the year - many of which will not be seen at any other toy marketplace in the world."

Starting with some of the big guys, and Mattel's inflatable Thomas dominated the gallery level. Once you headed into the 'booth', the focus was very much on innovation. The partnership with Google on View Master may have grabbed the headlines, but there were a number of other highlights in its line-up including the Imaginext T-Rex Dino, Thomas Minis, Hello Barbie, plus - my favourite - an actual levitating doll joining the Monster High range.

LEGO, Thinkway and Hasbro, meanwhile, starred

at a special Universal Partnerships & Licensing event - hosted away from the Javits - which enabled press and 'mom' bloggers to check out upcoming *Minions* and *Jurassic World* lines.

It was perhaps the lower level at the Javits though, where the true spirit of the toy industry shone through. This is where the smaller firms - and in some cases one-man-bands - showcased their lines with a pretty much unrivalled passion and enthusiasm.

The action figures and 'pop stop' aisles were incredibly busy, lead by Underground Toys, Funko and NECA - showing the growth and importance of both categories to US retail. The tech aisle also highlighted some gems including MOFF,

which looks like little more than an orange wristband but is actually a wearable smart toy that turns imagination into sounds.

And ever wanted to see three dinky robots dancing in time to Gangnam Style? Then you would have loved the Robots Kidslab booth.

Two beautiful stands which also caught my eye were from Apple Park, showcasing its line of organic Farm Buddies, plus Kruse, a toddler toy specialist from Germany, with its clean, bright and well laid out booth attracting interest.

The TIA continues to do a great job of making sure there is something for everyone at US Toy Fair and, if you can, it is well worth a visit. Just bring the layers.



TOY OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNERS

Activity: Crayola Paint Maker (Crayola)

Boys: Zoomer Dino (Spin Master)

e-Connected Toy: LEGO Fusion (LEGO)

Educational: LEGO Technic (LEGO)

Game: Simon Swipe (Hasbro)

Girls: Shopkins Small Mart Play-set (Moose Toys)

Infant/Toddler: Go Go Smart Animals Zoo Explorers Play-set (VTech)

Innovative: MiP (WowWee)

Outdoor: Nerf Rebelle Dolphina Bow (Hasbro)

Pre-school: LEGO Juniors (LEGO)

Property: Frozen (The Walt Disney Company)

Specialty: Gravity Maze (ThinkFun)

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Charmazing

Bringing technology and craft together, Wooky's new Charmazing collection enjoyed a successful launch at Toy Fair in London. The firm now details its marketing campaign to keep charm-making top of the bill this spring

CONTACT ■ Wooky Europe: 0151 494 3821 ■ www.wookyentertainment.com

WOOKY ENTERTAINMENT is offering young designers the chance to bring technology and craft together with the launch of its range of custom-made charm bracelets, Charmazing. Charmazing allows kids to scan their charms into a virtual world where they can trade with friends and connect with other fashionistas via its accompanying app. After the range's successful launch at London Toy Fair, Charmazing, part of the Style Me Up range, is now the focus of an extensive marketing campaign from Wooky Europe, with spring and summer initiatives running across TV, online, print and more.



CHANNEL CHARMAZING

Wooky will launch its Charmazing campaign with adverts running across Nickelodeon, Pop, Pop Girl and the Disney Channels. Ads will demonstrate how the Charmazing range works, with each 20 to 40 second slot acting as an infomercial and tutorials to engage around 72 per cent cover.

CRAFTY CLICKS

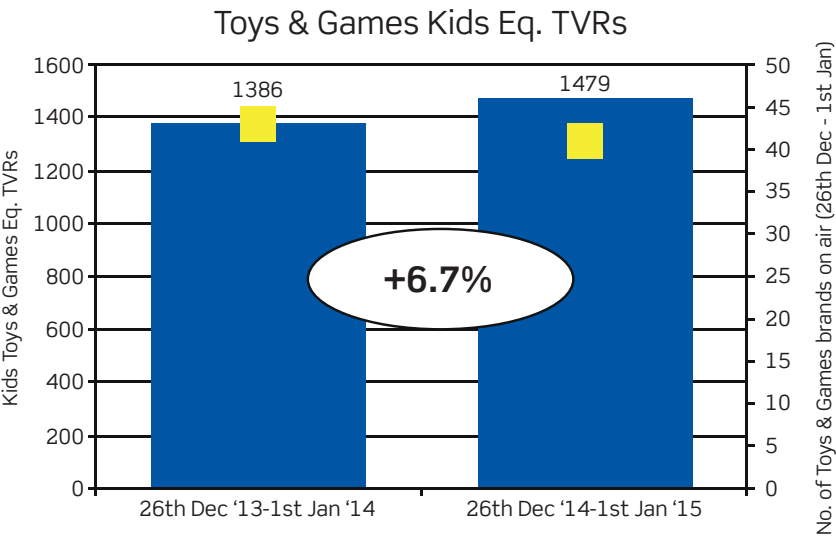
Starting this month, Charmazing will feature across Girls Go games websites, with 1.3 million impressions leading to YouTube tutorials that will in turn drive traffic to the Charmazing video content. Meanwhile, online fashion social gaming environments will also deliver over 200,000 points of engagement. The campaign will be complemented by targeted blogger activity and PR promotions.

PRINTS CHARMING

Charmazing will feature in exclusive cover mounts with leading girls' publications, sampling opportunities through sponsorship packages and a wide variety of competitions through high readership girls' titles. An Easter campaign offering over 3,500 relevant media will be distributed in the next few weeks, offering samples and giveaways.

Playtime

Generation Media asks are more toys and games advertisers focusing on product sell through post-Boxing Day than in previous years?



26th Dec 2014 - 1st Jan 2015	
Brand	Kids Eq. TVRs
LEGO CITY	154
LEGO BIONICLES	118
LEGO FRIENDS	78
HASBRO TWISTER	68
HASBRO NERF ELITE	63
INNOVATION HEXBUG CIRCUIT BOARDS	62
JAKKS SNOW GLOW ELSA DOLL	54
INNOVATION HEXBUG NANO V2 & AQUABOT	53
BRAINSTORM AQUA DRAGON & MAGNO Z	45
LEAPFROG LEAP TV	45

■ This month, we examine the number of toys and games campaigns launching from Boxing Day 2014 onwards potentially chasing further sell-through.

■ Analysis of consolidated TV data has shown that ad pressure within the toys and games market increased by six per cent during December 26th 2014 to January 1st 2015 vs the previous year, despite less campaigns on air.

■ In 2014, 17 toys and games TV campaigns went live on Boxing Day compared to 23 in 2013. However, the average TVRs per campaign across the one week period increased vs the previous year (36 vs 32 Kids Eq. TVRs).

■ The most heavily supported campaign from Boxing Day till January 1st 2015 was LEGO City, which was also the third top advertised brand during the same period in 2013.

■ With traditionally lower TV advertising costs during December to January, it will be interesting to see if more advertisers will follow suit in 2015 and focus on product sell through for key lines when Boxing Day sales kick off.

Source: BARB 2015

Retail Sales Trends

2015 kicks off in style for UK market

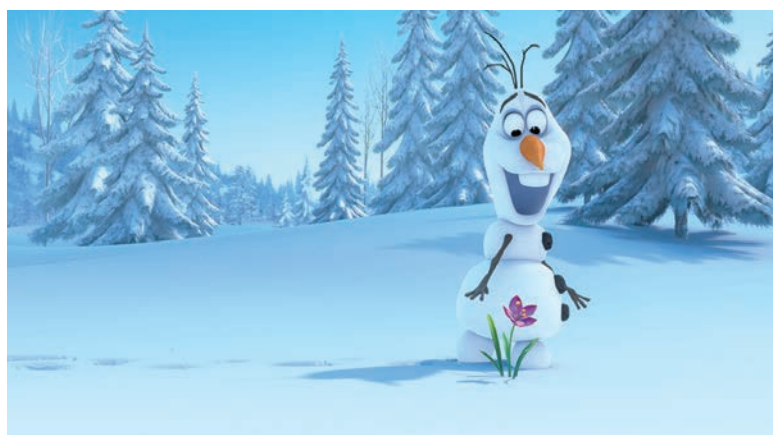
AFTER STRONG sales in 2014 with the UK toy market growing four per cent in value and 12 per cent in units, the start of 2015 saw sustained growth in the market – with January sales up eight per cent in value and nine per cent in units.

This performance was across the market with ten out of 11 super categories in growth. Seven super categories grew double digits in January, with the strongest growth coming from action figures, which grew an impressive 27 per cent in value on January 2014.

This was helped by *Minecraft*'s performance which was the number two property in action figures and was the number 14 property across the total market for the month.

Many properties had very good starts to 2015: Disney's *Frozen* continued as the number one property for the seventh month in a row and *Star Wars* was at number two with double digit growth.

LEGO City and Nerf also had strong January growth, while pre-school licences *Peppa Pig*



and *Thomas and Friends* also grew. *Transformers* and *Spider-Man* continued to grow after film releases last year.

"Licences have always been an integral part the UK toy market, accounting for £1 in every £4 spent last year," said Jez Fraser-Hook, practice director of NPD Group's toy business in the UK.

"Film properties had a huge impact in 2014 with Disney's *Frozen*, *The LEGO Movie*, *Transformers*, *Spider-Man* and

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles all adding sales to the market and 2015 looks to be another strong year for films.

"There are a number of films with strong toy offerings this year from *Spongebob Squarepants* and *Big Hero 6* to *Avengers* and *Jurassic World*.

"Plus with the *Frozen* phenomenon continuing, the *Minions* movie out in the summer and a certain film from a galaxy far, far away out in December this is a strong year to be a film licensee in toys."

Properties

Best item progression

January 2015

Shopkins Pack of 12

The Flair line soared up the charts from number 259 in December 2014 to number 12 in January, a massive 246 places.



Sales

UK toy sales (value, year-to-date)



Source: NPD



Average toy price

January '14: £7.49



January '15: £7.57



UK RETAIL SALES TRENDS

January 2015 (£ sales – value)

1 LEGO MINIFIGURES

LEGO

2. FROZEN SNOW GLOW ELSA JAKKS PACIFIC

3. MATCH ATTAX 2014/15 TOPPS

4. LEAPSTER LEARNING LIBRARY SOFTWARE LEAPFROG

5. INNOTAB VTECH

6. LEAPPAD LEAPFROG

7. HOT WHEELS BASIC CAR ASSORTMENT MATTEL

8. DISNEY FROZEN ELSA SPARKLING ICE CASTLE LEGO

9. SHOPKINS 2 PACK FLAIR

10. MONOPOLY STANDARD HASBRO



January 2015 (Unit sales – volume)

1 MATCH ATTAX 2014/15

TOPPS

2. LEGO MINIFIGURES LEGO

3. HOT WHEELS BASIC CAR ASSORTMENT MATTEL

4. DISNEY FROZEN ENCHANTED 2015 STICKERS PANINI

5. SHOPKINS 2 PACK FLAIR

6. PREMIER LEAGUE STICKER COLLECTION 2015 TOPPS

7. PLAY-DOH CLASSIC FOUR PACK HASBRO

8. PLAY-DOH SINGLE TUB ASSORTMENT HASBRO

9. LEGO MIXELS LEGO

10. MLP MYSTERY BAG ASSORTMENT HASBRO

Notes: All participating NPD retail data suppliers provide weekly data via epos systems. NPD figures are not projected to represent non-participating retailers but provide 100 per cent of the sales from participating stores. Epos sample includes the following retailers: Amazon.co.uk, Argos, Asda, Boots, Debenhams, ELC, Firebox, Freemans, Grattan, Halfords, Hamleys, HMV, John Lewis, Marks & Spencer, Mothercare, Next, Play.com, Sainsbury's, Shop Direct, Tesco, The Entertainer, Toys R Us, Toymaster, WHSmith, Wilkinsons. NPD estimates that the epos now accounts for 78% of the total toy market.



01932 355 580

Industry moves

This month, the industry sees a swathe of new appointments; from a BigJigs restructuring to Hasbro's new chairman of the board. Meanwhile, Cartamundi stars as our Team of the Month

TEAM OF THE MONTH

Who's in the team?

We have Paul Roberts (group CSO), Trudi Bishop (head of marketing and licensing), Kevin Scott (sales director UK), Hayley Macleod (UK retail sales manager), Sadie Baile-Roberts (Jnr NAM), Emma Watts (sales and marketing assistant), Thaia Vosper (maternity leave KAM), Lewis Young (private label and promotions sales), Enrico Tassinari (BDM games, EU), John Langley (sales manager games UK), Jerry Charter (UK loyalty sales manager), and Charlene Meader (sales order input).

What have been your biggest successes in the last 12 months?

The launch of our Shuffle range, of course. These portable, hybrid card games with digital enhancements were a new venture for us – on a very tight timeline.

There were many challenges but the success of the launch, store placement and TV ad was the result of us really working well as a team.

What are you guys working on now?

The Shuffle story continues. We are expanding the range this year, adding some

CARTAMUNDI

fantastic licences such as *James Bond* and Disney, as well as our very own Trump Twist products.

What is the hardest part of the job?

Keeping everybody happy, juggling price points, promotions, timing, appropriate licences, show attendance and meeting customer demand. Still, so far, so good...

And what's the best?

Being part of a creative and fascinating sector that just happens to be about toys. You get to play with and talk about toys every day



and someone pays you to do it. There's a regret, with all the technology coming through, that you're not a kid yourself. Being part of a child's history and helping to shape their future is a privilege. Why would you work in any other industry?

Who is the Cartamundi office practical joker?

Lewis. He's the one that keeps us smiling and laughing with his comments and antics. Not sure he'd like us to go into detail about them though.

Who makes the best cuppa?

We asked around. Everyone thinks they're the best, but no one will agree that it's their turn.

BIGJIGS ■ The firm has kicked off the year with a double appointment, welcoming a new agent for Scotland and creating a new role of house account manager. Following the retirement of **DAVE SOUTAR** at the end of 2014, **ANDREW DICKSON** has joined to represent the firm. Dickson arrives at BigJigs from Galt Toys.



The company has also reapointed **SHARON GARDNER** in the role of house account manager. Gardner previously spent a number of years as the firm's credit controller.

its new UK sales director. His appointment follows a restructuring of the Plum UK and international sales teams. **PHILIP JAMES** will now lead the brand's global sales as international sales director, supported by international account manager **LORETTA TANG**.



SEEDLING USA

■ Formerly of Asobi, **THIERRY BOURRET**

has joined the team as it continues plans for international expansion. He joins with extensive experience in the sector, having founded and directed the UK distributor.



ORCHARD TOYS

■ The firm has welcomed a new Scottish agent in the form of

STEPHEN BURNS as former agent **DAVE SOUTAR** retires after 15 years with the Orchard Toys team.



UNDERGROUND TOYS

■ The team has appointed **EVA VERHAAK** as

its new marketing and PR manager. Verhaak joins the firm from The Marketing Store Worldwide, where she was an account director. She brings a wealth of global marketing experience and a record of successful campaigns.



BRAINSTORM

■ Industry veteran, **MARK SHARP** has

joined the educational toy specialist as its new sales agent, covering South Wales and South West. Boasting 15 years experience within the industry, Sharp has previously held roles at Ty Europe, John Adams and Schleich UK.



LEAPFROG

■ **DAMIAN HALL** has joined as the firm's new sales director

for UK and Ireland. Hall will now be responsible for providing strategic sales leadership and management to the UK and Ireland commercial operation. He joins from Proctor & Gamble.



MGA ENTERTAINMENT AND ZAPF CREATION

■ The UK sales team has been expanded with two new hires. **TIM FOLEY** has joined as field sales manager, while former Paul Lamond exec, **CARL VERNUM** moves into a similar role. The pair boast a wealth of experience within the UK toy industry.



TOYMASTER

■ The buying group has promoted **IAN EDMUNDS**

to the role of managing director, while **YOGI PARMAR** takes on the role of operations director.



HASBRO

■ President and CEO, **BRIAN GOLDNER** has been

appointed as chairman of the board. Goldner will take over from **AL VERRECCHIA** when he retires in May, following 50 years service at the firm.



GALT TOYS

■ With 33 years experience in the toy industry,



PLUM PRODUCTS

■ Former Mookie Toys exec, **STEWART MIDDLETON**

has joined the team as





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2015: The year of the movie licence

Steve Reece celebrates a year brimming with box office behemoths like Minions, Jurassic World and Star Wars, while warning of the potential risks involved when backing a 'hit' licence

BASED ON what was on show at toy fairs this time round, 2015 is shaping up to be the year of the movie licence.

With *Frozen* still apparently burning hot into 2015, and with new movies coming up for *Star Wars*, *Avengers*, *Minions*, *Jurassic World*, *Fantastic Four* and several notable others, the toy aisles will be crammed with movie merchandise this year.

This should be a good thing for companies who have these licences. In fact, it's hard to see how any of the above can fail to drive hefty toy sales off shelf both around release and again for DVD release/into peak season and beyond.

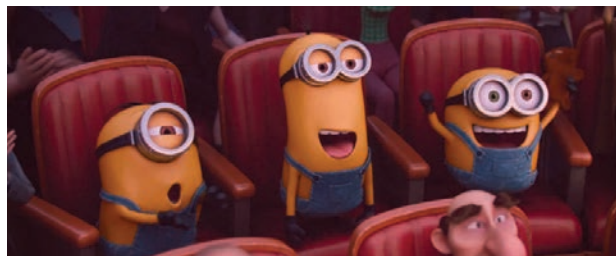
When we look at financial analyst reviews of the toy industry in 2015, it's inevitable they will focus on top line impact of these movie mammoths.

However, there are clear risk factors/potential negative influences on the industry during this year nevertheless. Sales do not always equate to profit, and so yes, overall the industry as measured both at retail pricing and toy company net sales levels should grow this year, but profitability may not.

Paying high licensing royalties is often viewed as a necessary evil, but often sales teams can become waylaid by the glitzy easy sell of the hot licence,

missing the critical profit drivers in the process.

It's critical, therefore, to reinforce and support your underlying owned brands



in years where in and out lower profit opportunities take so much shelf space.

Using licences on a co-brand basis to build/support your own intellectual property offers a sales driver, may increase the value of your brand assets

and should support/protect your ongoing business.

Another point to note is the window of opportunity and risk of downside.

Without wishing to sound like the harbinger of doom, over betting is more dangerous to toy companies than under betting when it comes to the hit and miss world of movies. For every unexpected smash hit

movie/new franchise launch such as *Frozen* there are more flops (sparing names to save embarrassment all round!).

Any company betting the house on a single licence, movie, brand is just waiting to fail.

Moreover, one thing *Frozen* proved was that demand will wait (to a degree) to be fulfilled, whereas huge inventory hangover on a flop is a problem that won't wait if you want to stay in business.

So here's to 2015, the year of the movie licence in the toy business.

Let's take advantage of the opportunity while also effectively managing the risk.

Steve Reece runs a leading consultancy delivering consumer research and manufacturing sourcing services to toy and game companies. Contact him via www.KidsBrandInsight.com.



Tech toys, and where to find them

Dr Jim Wyatt of toy inventor company Wow! Labs looks at where the next wave of innovation in our industry is set to come from, and why it's up to toy firms to seek out inventors

IT IS SAID that once upon a time an inventor could bring a great idea to a toy company on paper and that was their extent of involvement in the project.

Well, I've been taking ideas to toy companies for 15 years now and I can't remember a time when that ever worked out for me.

Now, I should caveat that statement with the fact that Wow! Labs tend to produce concepts for tech based products that do something new or different, such as Dave the Monkey and RealFX Racing. So it is understandable that we might have to prove the feasibility of our idea, especially when it sounds impossible.

However that kind of deal is rarely on the table these days no matter the complexity of what you are pitching.

Ultimately that means that tech inventors are now having to produce ever more elaborate proofs

more time spent on proofs of concept means fewer concepts each year being produced by inventors and, therefore, being seen by toy companies.

This doesn't mean that toy companies aren't interested

The world has changed a lot in ten years and, as an industry, we clearly need to start casting our net further afield.

of concept in an industry where tech based products have more in common with consumer electronics than the toys of yesteryear.

This presents multiple challenges for inventors and toy companies alike;

in seeing concepts from independent inventors, far from it.

Independents bring some of the freshest ideas to the table when it comes to tech, but where as they used to bring ten ideas for clever

mechanisms or gameplay, when it comes to tech, they are bringing just one or two.

So where will we find this new breed of inventors?

The traditional route of toy inventors coming to us is still, and always will be, wide open, but inventors may not see applications for their brainchild in the toy industry as they may be too busy focusing on other market sectors that they are more familiar with.

The world has changed a lot in ten years and, as an industry, we clearly need to start casting our net further afield and being proactive in seeking out new ideas rather than assuming that the best ideas will come to us.

Often it is the 'makers' and the 'doers' that are employed in industries adjacent to ours as part of their day jobs that are just having fun on weekends and showing off their projects at fairs and online.

Others are forging their own path on Kickstarter, Indiegogo and at industry shows or perhaps, even like myself and others at Wow! Stuff, are academics that just want to get their cutting edge research into the hands of a wider audience.

It's up to us to find these inventors and make them aware of the opportunities in our \$80 billion market as, sadly, they are probably not reading this article in a toy trade publication.

Dr Jim Wyatt is creative director at Wow! Stuff's inventor arm, Wow! Labs. He can be contacted at Jim@wowstuff.com.



So long, farewell...

David Smith is stepping down from his position at ToyTalk, and in his last column for ToyNews, reveals the six best toys he's encountered during his time at the site

AFTER NINE years at ToyTalk, I am stepping down to pursue other interests.

After launching the site at the 2006 Toy Fair at ExCeL London, it really has been an amazing journey.

ToyTalk will now be run entirely by Eleanor de Bruin, who has been with us since 2009 (and editor for the past two years), so I know the site is in good hands.

This will therefore be my last column for *ToyNews* as a toy industry 'expert' and I wanted to take the opportunity to thank everyone I have worked with over the past nine years, but I also wanted to remain focused on the real stars of this industry – the toys themselves.

Here, then, is my very personal list of the six best toys I encountered over my years at ToyTalk...

Hippychick Tiger Wheely Bug: This was a hit from the moment we received our sample. That was back in 2008 and, remarkably, it is still with us. It is also still a magnet for any children that come into our house.

Flair Evel Knievel Dare Devil Stunt Set: Nostalgia played its part in my love for this (it was a re-release of a 1970s toy) but it won its place on this list by actually being better than I remembered it. The little plastic Evel is just as fearless as the great man himself in his heyday (and far more durable).

Automoblox: I have a definite soft spot for wooden toys. Throw in elegant design and the Automoblox range was always sure to catch my eye. It was our Toy of the Year in 2007 and, like the Wheely Bug, our Automoblox sample is still going strong.

Le Toy Van Lionheart Castle: You don't always have to come up with new ideas to create a great toy, you can simply take a classic concept and perfect it. This is the castle that every small boy should get the chance to play with.

KAPLA: Toys don't get much simpler than these plain wooden blocks. The key to their appeal is the

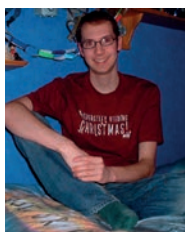
way they call out to adults and children alike to be built into forts, bridges, towers, animals, houses...

Tomy Battle Deck Mega Raceway: This racing game managed to bring something entirely fresh and

original to the genre – the ability to customise your cars and watch them battle with other souped-up vehicles. Irresistible.



David Smith runs the consumer-focused toy news site ToyTalk (www.toytalk.co.uk) and is the author of the book, 100 Classic Toys.



Happy Families

As Sylvanian Families celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, National Trust employee and long-term collector **Mark Harvey** explains why the brand still holds its appeal for adults across the UK

SYLVANIAN FAMILIES is one of those toys that when you mention the name, it elicits uncontrollable squeals of joy from twenty and thirtysomethings who remember it from their own childhood.

One of those nostalgic fans is me. I own over 100 Sylvanian characters, 20 buildings and more accessories than I could even list. My collection has its own room in my house.

I am aware that as a 30 year old male, I don't fit the stereotypical profile of a Sylvanian Families collector – which I imagine is a six year old girl with pigtails and a penchant for adorable creatures – but I find they're just too cute to resist.

Looking back 25 years, I remember going to the zoo and being particularly drawn to Ming Ming the giant panda. She was a wonderful creature with beautiful, black eye 'patches' and such a kind and gentle expression. After that, I had to have a Sylvanian Families Bamboo Panda Family, my first family of many.

Fast forward 25 years and my Panda Family are still standing proud in my Regency Hotel, surrounded by nearly every Sylvanian Family released in the UK within the last five years, and framed against a village of 20 or so Sylvanian buildings, as well as a vintage collection which always takes me down memory lane.

My generation is becoming increasingly nostalgic for retro 80s brands and I think the reason Sylvanian Families

transported back to those days in their childhood, which of course is an incredibly powerful selling tool for the brand owner now.

I own over 100 Sylvanian characters, 20 buildings and more accessories than I could even list. My collection has its own room in my house.

continues to resonate with us is because those memories of playing with them for hours on end and making up our own stories about the characters are still so vivid.

Mention early items such as the Canal Boat, Country Cottage, Bakery or Windmill and people who had the toys are immediately

It's no surprise the brand is still hugely popular, nor that most of my generation has kept their collections in the attic ready to introduce to their own children.

Naturally, you can imagine my delight when Epoch making toys contacted us to suggest the possibility of a partnership with

Hatchlands Park, the National Trust property in Surrey where I work as the House Steward.

Aside from my love of the toys, it's great to see the nature theme being brought to life for young fans. I'm sure our magnificent park and elegant Georgian mansion will create the perfect backdrop for the Sylvanian Families summer picnic, which we're busy planning with Epoch making toys to mark the 30th anniversary.

Our picnic on Sunday, July 12th will be the southern event, and for fans in the north there will be a similar picnic at Wallington National Trust in Northumbria on Saturday, August 1st. I can't wait.

Mark Harvey is a steward for Hatchlands Park and avid Sylvanian Families collector.

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The sky's the limit



The flying toys market is evolving and today's RC enthusiast now has their eyes firmly on the skies as toy companies welcome a new invasion. **Robert Hutchins** asks how retailers can take advantage

IF THERE is one thing to take away from this year's London Toy Fair, it's that the Drones sector is certainly on the up.

It was the audible buzz of the latest gadgetry that filled London's Olympia this year, as the venue played host to more drone and quadcopter specialists than seen in previous years.

From Flying Gadgets' headline grabbing X-Voice, a drone that will respond to voice commands via a connected headset, to Bladez Toyz' water blasting XBladez Quad, quadcopters stamped their presence on toy fair season, prompting the question: is 2015 the year of the drone?

Bladez Toyz has seen demand for drones increase by 450 per cent over the last two years, while the UK distributor of the Parrot AR Drone, Flying Toys has seen turnover rocket by a whopping 700 per cent since the launch of its Bebop Drone in January. www.toynews-online.biz

Billed by many as the 'next iteration of the RC helicopter,' and armed with 'better stability and greater ease of use,' the industry is confident that the popularity of the quadcopter will only continue to soar over the next 12 months.

"What we are seeing with drones is an evolution, rather than a revolution," Wow Stuff's Richard North tells *ToyNews*.

"Helicopters will continue to sell, but consumers are being rapidly educated on the benefits of drones and we expect to see them overtake sales of regular RC helicopters over the next two years."

As the UK distributor of the TX Juice Pocket Drone, priced at £39.99, Wow Stuff is keen on leading the drone sector to toy retail.

But it is only in recent years that drones (formerly carrying price points upwards of £300) have made the shift from specialist stores to the shelves of toy retailers.

While smartphone technology and media buzz around concepts like Amazon's drone delivery system have helped put the quadcopter in the spotlight, its current popularity at retail can really be boiled down to one factor: numbers.

"We are now starting to see drones get to a good toy retail price point,"

a much simpler one to broach, helping to pepper the sector with an array of family-friendly USPs.

Wall climbing, voice-controlled, HD camera-equipped, even water-blasting; all are becoming common terms associated with the toy drones market as manufacturers devise new points of difference in the field.

What we are seeing with drones is an evolution, rather than a revolution.

Richard North, Wow Stuff

explains Stuart Grant, buying director at The Entertainer. "A lot of the prices are now more mass market, hovering around the £50 to £100 mark, which is great news for the High Street retailer."

The toy companies themselves are finding the once hobby-exclusive club of drone technology

"The accessibility for us as a toy manufacturer to get in to the drone market has allowed us to create innovative drones at price points that slot nicely into the toy sector," says Bladez Toyz' managing director, Iain Morgan.

Back on the High Street, retailers are embracing the emerging variations.

"Our [quadcopter] sales have risen exponentially, and they will continue to do so due to the constant innovation in the sector and respect we receive from the drone community," explains Taz Harney, PR manager at toy and gadget retailer, Red5.

And it is a thriving community indeed, and one that is growing larger by the day, says Flying Gadgets' MD, Josh Farleigh.

"RC fans are definitely forming a large quadcopter community, especially on social media," he says. "People are desperate to find the newest products out there, and it's a community destined to continue to increase."

And while the tech fans and flying fanatics flock to the likes of YouTube to discover the latest in drone technology, we decided to save you the bother with an extensive look at the newest products to fly into retail this year.

FLYING TOYS

With drones rapidly becoming the fastest growing category in the remote control toy and model market, Flying Toys kicked off the year with the introduction of the Parrot Bebop Drone, dubbed by many as the 'ultimate flying camera.'

Equipped with a powerful 14 megapixels fisheye camera, the Bebop Drone can capture video and pictures in a 180-degree field.

Loaded with the digital technology of three-axis image stabilization, the drone can capture 1080 pixels HD video, even when moving.

Always connected, the Bebop Drone can also stream videos and photos in real time onto a smartphone or tablet, allowing users to share shots instantly on Facebook and YouTube.

Maintaining the theme of connectivity, pilots can also plan their flight paths by touching waypoints on their smartphone, and let the Drone tackle the difficult part itself.

But if it is ultimate control you're after, then the Parrot

Bebop Drone Skycontroller will allow the user to helm the drone via two precise joysticks, extending the drone's range up to two kilometres in the process.

Lightweight yet robust, the Bebop Drone has been designed with safety in mind.

It boasts propellers that stop automatically in case of accidental contact, an emergency mode as well as

an innovative GPS Return Home function.

The Parrot Bebop Drone offers consumers 22 minutes of flight time and a 8GB internal memory.

Meanwhile, the Parrot Rolling Spider is a much smaller minidrone, ideal for indoor flying, while incorporating many of the AR Drone's original features.

With the ability to be clipped into a lightweight

two-wheeled structure, the Spider can be driven along the floor or the air.

The Rolling Spider can be controlled via a smartphone, tablet or joystick controller.

Flying Toys' Rolling Spider can also perform an array of stunts, including 90 or 180-degree turns and a 360-degree flip.

01702 295 110



FLYING GADGETS

Flying Gadgets is shaking up the quadcopter market in 2015 with a host of new innovative additions, and yes, that includes the introduction of voice control.

The Flying Gadgets X-Vision is a brand new entry-level quad machine, offering users the ability to flip and roll while maintaining high spec tech credentials.

Sub £100, the X-Vision comes equipped with a searchlight and first person view, allowing users to

beam back live HD footage to an Apple device attached to the drone's remote control unit.

"This is where the quadcopter wars are set to be fought in 2015, and the Flying Gadgets X-Vision, with its superior build and features, is set to be a soar away success," said Flying Gadgets' MD, Josh Farleigh.

The Flying Gadgets X-Voice, meanwhile, is the 'only drone of its kind in the world,' utilising

voice control technology programmed to respond to 16 different languages.

"It's able to understand accents and dialects and is virtually indestructible thanks to the caging that surrounds each of the four propellers," added Farleigh.

Users can command the X-Voice to 'take off', 'land', 'dance' and 'flip right, left, back or forward' and it retails for £49.99.

A brand new mid-size quadcopter, the Flying Gadgets Gee Quad boasts an auto level function and comes equipped to live-stream video from its high definition camera.

The entry-level piece is suited to those new to world of drones, as well as the more experienced flyers.

Flying Gadgets has also been chosen as one of the official distributors for the

DJI brand of drones in the UK. DJI recently unveiled its most advanced drone to date, the Inspire 1, and Flying Gadgets is the first company in the UK to receive stock.

"We are attempting to be the innovators in the drones market," said Farleigh. "And with this year's line-up, we are certainly increasing our hold on the UK market."

0844 209 2626



FLAIR

Flair is soaring into the flying toy sector this summer, encouraging kids to take off and battle with the next generation of toy drones, the HoverTech.

Combining precision and technology, HoverTech features both drones and blasters in a unique gameplay of target practice and flying battle.

HoverTech Target FX has a built-in floor sensor enabling it to hover 1.5 metres above the ground. Once up in the air, kids can take aim and

fire the dart blaster, attempting to shoot the drone down from the sky.

Meanwhile, HoverTech Battle FX includes two target sensors. Hit either target twice and the drone falls from the sky. But to make the challenge tougher, the HoverTech Battle FX drone spins in the air, while the drone features a ceiling sensor, enabling it to hover 1.5 metres from the ceiling.

The HoverTech range will be available from July 2015.

0208 643 0320



WOW STUFF

This year, Wow Stuff is bringing the bestselling, world's smallest quadcopter to the UK, with the TX Juice Pocket Drone.

At only one and a half inches, the Pocket Drone fits into its handset carry case and charges while in a consumer's pocket.

"Kids and adults can now take the Pocket Drone anywhere and everywhere they go, and it's always ready to fly," said Wow Stuff's Richard North.

Designed by university graduates, the Pocket Drone has already sold 700,000 pieces in the US and is fitted with a unique 'Juice' button, that once pressed will activate its stunt feature.

Pocket Drone incorporates a four-channel mode, an auto trim system and is gyro stabilized for easy flying. Arriving this July, the drone carries with it the modest price tag of £39.99.

Meanwhile, the TX Juice Ai Stunt drone, retailing at £49.99, uses artificial intelligence and features a patented auto take-off and land system.

"TX Juice is the fastest growing entrant into the RC sector and its inaugural year sales exceeded \$10m," added North. "Pocket Drone will be the star in a line of new drones this year."

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Revell
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BLADEZ TOYZ

Following the success of its Super Jumbo RC collection in previous years, Bladez Toyz is hitting the other end of the scale with the launch of its Mycropodz range, featuring the super-nano, seven centimetre quadcopter.

Featuring a neon design and on-board flashing lights for night-time flying, the Mycropodz minidrone features a full four channel gyro control, making the quad stable and easy to fly.

The quadcopter even has the ability to perform 360-degree flips, while its 2.4Ghz means as many as ten consumers can play together at once.

Available this May, the Bladez Mycropodz Quad arrives with a pack away and play feature and handset-charging combo.

Meanwhile, the XBladez Quad offers flight enthusiasts stable outdoor control, as well as a red and blue LED light display a wide array of add-ons.

With a built in gyro, the drone can remain stable in outdoor winds, while the five user modes lets consumers choose how much power they want to use, while the 2.4Ghz control allows up to 15 play together at once.

The XBladez Quad can be souped up with a water blaster, as well as a target missile launcher. The user is also able to upgrade their attachments to an electronic winch, a bubble machine or a HD camera.

02392 658 259



TOP RACE

New York-based RC specialist Top Race is rocketing into the UK market this year with its latest line-up of innovative drones and quadcopters.

Fresh from the New York Toy Fair this February, the firm has already reported an excellent response to its collection, ranging from Mini Quads with in-built cameras to Fighter Jet-style drones. Top Race is now confident of replicating the success in the UK.

Leading its 2015 line-up is the Top Race TR-Q510 Mini Quad Cam, a four channel quadcopter feature an in-built video

camera. Boasting a six axis gyro system and a 2.4Ghz transmitter, the drone can be used indoors and out, while capturing high resolution images and video footage.

The Mini Quad also boasts a range of movements, including the ability to perform stunt flips and video capture with the push of a button.

Retailing at \$71.99, the Mini Quad arrives with a charging cable, 2GB Micro SD card, card reader and extra parts.

Joining the Mini Quad is the Top Race F22 Fighter Jet, a four channel quadcopter themed in fighter jet styling.

With a full range of movements, the durable drone is suitable for both outdoor and indoor play and according to the firm is ideal for beginners.

With a charge time of around 40 minutes, the F22 Fighter Jet can remain airborne for 12 minutes of flight time. With a charger, mini screwdriver, landing wheels and manual in tow, the Top Race F22 Fighter Jet retails at \$68.99.

Completing the Top Race drone line-up for 2015 is the Top Race Four Channel Micro Quad Copter Rolling Copter TR-MQ3. It's not just a drone, says Top Race, but a rambler, too. This drone can roll, fly and flip and is heading towards the UK this year.

info@toprace.com



REVELL

Revell Control's track record for award-winning radio controlled gadgets has been boosted with two Best New Toy Awards for its Quadcopter X-Spy and Quadcopter Rayvore.

Voted the British Toy & Hobby Association's Best New Toy in the Tech Toys category for London Toy Fair 2015, the X-Spy is equipped with a camera to stream video or pictures to your smartphone via a WiFi connection.

Revell's 2.4 GHz Quadcopter Rayvore, voted the BTHA's Best New Toy in the Hobby category, features high-powered motors and four flight modes from beginner to expert.

Other quadcopters in the portfolio include the easy-to-fly, 90mm Video quadcopter Spot, equipped with a digital micro camera and 2GB micro SD card.

Meanwhile, the Multicopter Hexatron FPV

features integrated camera and video; the four-channel Multicopter Nano Hex is ideal for beginners and experts alike.

The four-channel Quadcopter Tritan boasts power and stability, while the Jet Fighter is a mini quadcopter in a F-22 jet fighter design, capable of an array of tricks.

All Revell Control drones feature the latest in infrared, MHz and GHz technology. Each is officially tested and compliant with European standards and comes complete with batteries, spare parts and multi-lingual instructions.

Revell offers suppliers, customers and consumers a dedicated European distribution and customer support network, and the Hertfordshire-based branch operates a full sales and customer service facility for the UK market.

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App-racadabra

Marvin's Magic's big innovation for this year is i-Magic, a type of trickery enhanced via the use of a smart phone and a dedicated app. Company founder Marvin Berglas tells **Billy Langsworthy** why it's the future of magic

How was 2014 for Marvin's Magic?

We had a great year. What was exciting was we had a lot of new customers join our already good customer base. They came back and said they did really well with our stuff so we expect to do even better this year.

We opened up in a lot of international areas and we've done great business in Australia, the Middle East and Scandinavia. We're now exporting to 64 different territories.

Every kid, at one time in their life, has been given a magic set. Our job is to make sure their experience of magic is a good one. If people don't know much about magic and they get a set with tonnes of different pieces and bad instructions, by the end of Christmas Day, that's the end of their experience with magic.

What do you attribute that success to?

We exceed the customer's expectations; we give them suitable props for the age and size of the kids' hands with instructions that work. From that, it gives them playground power because it builds social skills, interaction skills and dexterity.

It's the total antithesis to all computer games because it's all about family values and the kids get to express their personalities. We've started so many magicians

off over the years, literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions, all around the world.

We started off as a demonstrations company and a lot of the guys have gone on to become great demonstrators and top professionals. We've had an amazing array of people come through our ranks.

We are now the benchmark for retail entertainment and that is so important in transforming the experience of shopping.

I come from a showbusiness background. My mum was an actress and my dad was the first TV magician in this country so showmanship has been instilled in me. I've put those qualities into our demonstrations to make them enthusiastic and eye catching. It puts smiles on people's faces.

Why do you think magic still carries such an allure for children?

If you've got a skill in anything, be it sport, music or any form of entertainment, you can be the life and soul of the party. But it's important to be good.

For example, it's better to have a good violinist because if you have a bad violinist, it's better to have no violinist at all.

Magic should only start at six to eight years old. From there, we give them confidence through the early years to our Mind Blowing Magic, which is more edgy, street magic. Then we have a range of executive magic that is suitable and impressive enough for adults, but easy enough for an aspirational kid.



What's new for 2015?

We have our latest innovation with Marvin's i-Magic, which are cool boxes of tricks that are great in themselves, but can also interact with our app. We think we had the product of London Toy Fair with it. It's blown people away.

It's smart magic for smart devices. We think it's the future of magic.

And how important is i-Magic to the company moving forward?

Marvin's i-Magic is absolutely the way forward. It's an interesting concept and I think it's the future of magic. We're pushing it one section further. We're not doing technology for technology's sake. It's innovative.

And we're first to it. Magic has been around for thousands of years and I'm interested in taking it to the next level. Retailers need to carry magic and more of them are not just stocking boxes, but dedicating whole sections to it because they know it's a growing thing.

Are you confident 2015 can be just as successful as last year?

I don't just think, I know 2015 will be even better. I'd be very surprised if we don't have another 20 per cent increase.

that mean to you?

It was fantastic. It was a fantastic surprise and a wonderful accolade from people in the industry.

I'm slightly on the periphery a bit as we're quite niche, so to get

Magic has been around for thousands of years. I'm interested in taking it to the next level.

Marvin Berglas, Marvin's Magic

You have one foot in the magic industry and one foot in the toy industry. Is the world of magic happy to promote the medium via 'toy ranges'?

We're the only magic officially recommended by the Magic Circle who promote excellence in magic. I think they'd rather have a company like us, who understands magic, promote magic.

You picked up the Outstanding Contribution Award at this year's Toy Industry Awards. What did

something based on our retail entertainment, they said we're the benchmark for that, and because it was nominated for by the likes of Hamleys and Harrods, was fantastic.

What's interesting is that I feel like I've done the double because last March I got the Outstanding Contribution to Magic Award from the British Magic Society. It's the oldest magic society in the world and past presidents judge it.

To get two in two industries within a year is quite something.



Valuing play

Star of Quest TV's *Toy Hunter*, Jordan Hembrough tells **Billy Langsworthy** about the current toys set to be worth something in years to come, his very own 'one that got away' and why the toy sector's love of retro licences could actually be damaging the industry. Best start digging around in that loft for hidden gems

JORDAN HEMBROUGH is the *Toy Hunter*. It's an enviable job title, but rather than taking a rifle to a family of Hungry Hungry Hippos, Hembrough's hunting sees him make a living from buying and selling rare toys.

This will come as no surprise to Quest TV viewers. *Toy Hunter* has aired on the channel in the UK since 2012 and the latest series is now on screens. But Hembrough was a toy dealer way before TV producers came calling.

"Out of college I got a job as a buyer for a chain of comic and retail stores in the US," Hembrough tells *ToyNews*:

"I was a buyer for 13 stores so when that company went out of business, I bought the entire inventory out and started my company, Hollywood Heroes. We buy and sell antique and vintage toys."

The company has become one of the largest of its kind in the US and four years ago TV came a knocking looking for a *Toy Hunter*.

He's made a living out of it ever since, and Hembrough believes the UK is a perfect base for a budding toy hunter.

He adds: "One of the most expensive items I have discovered here in the UK during season three of *Toy Hunter*: It was a 1966 Batman equipment set. There are only known to be four of them in the world. It sold for \$20,000. It's super rare."

When comparing a toy that's never been played with versus a rare toy that has been opened, he claims it's complicated as to which would sell for more.

"If you're compared apples to apples, with an unopened toy versus an opened one, the unopened toy is going to be worth two or three times more," states Hembrough.

"But sometimes if you do have an extremely rare



toy that's been played with, you've got to take it on a case-by-case basis."

It's impossible to chat to Hembrough and not be simultaneously scanning your mind for potential toy goldmines that may be laying about the attic. But for consumers swamping

but it will show up a year later in a pack assortment, leaving collectors a little bummed out.

"The term 'limited edition' is a marketing thing now. 'Limited' to a large company means 150,000 pieces. You have to put it all into perspective."

I'll never get rid of my Star Wars figures from when I was a kid. They're not worth much but they're mine.

Jordan Hembrough, *Toy Hunter*

the aisles now, Hembrough believes one current toy line looks set to be a worthwhile investment: Hot Toys.

"The craftsmanship is second to none and the good thing about Hot Toys is that when they tell you they are making a certain number of figures, they stick to that number, thereby preserving the collectability," he adds.

"Big companies like Hasbro or Mattel will tell you something is limited

And when it comes to properties, Hembrough claims that brands boasting longevity have the best chance of being valuable in years to come.

He advises: "Go for a licence that will still be around. Look at stuff around now and think was it viable 50 years ago. Look at the likes of *Star Wars* and *Batman*."

There is a thirst for retro toys amongst consumers at the moment, be it nostalgia-

inducing properties like *Thunderbirds* or *Clangers* or firm's like Funko launching ReAction figures designed to look like the 1980s originals.

Hembrough believes it points to a fear of the new from toy firms.

"Everyone loves the nostalgia factor and there's nothing new coming out anymore," he says.

"Toy companies are afraid to go out and invest in a new property right now, so they are staying safe with licences that are winners."

"I give Mattel credit though for coming out with Monster High. It was a huge hit and they had the balls to try something new. It's what you're supposed to do."

"Inventors should be inventing toys for the younger generation. Stop sitting on your butt trying to reinvent the old brands that someone else put all the work into. Do something new."

In a life of buying and selling some of the most loved toys of all time, there

has been a few regrets. And Hembrough's very own 'one that got away' comes from a galaxy, far, far away.

"It was a prototype wax sculpting, the only one in the world, of Boba Fett from the Kenner line of action figures," he reveals.

"I bought it from the designer and I sold it 15 years ago for \$55,000. It's worth well over \$120,000 today. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about that."

After that particular punch to the gut, is there anything the *Toy Hunter* will never part with?

"As I get older I'm starting to hold onto more things because I kind of miss them when they go," he concludes.

"I'll never get rid of my *Star Wars* figures from when I was a kid. They're not worth a lot but they're mine. It's why toys are so much more than just toys. They're a piece of who we are."

Toy Hunter can be seen on Wednesday evenings on Quest TV.

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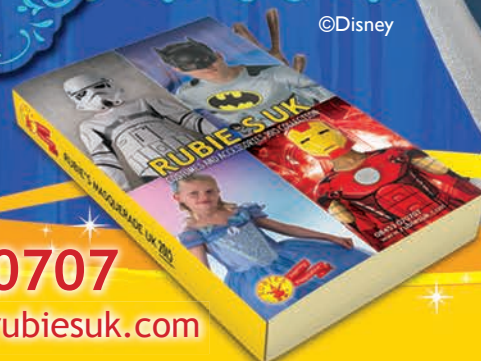
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ToyNews *Women* OF THE YEAR 2015

Following the success of our inaugural Women of the Year event in 2014, the listing and networking lunch will return – bigger and better – this year. **Samantha Loveday** explains



SINCE LAUNCHING our first ever Women of the Year power list and networking event last year, we've been inundated with emails, calls and requests to find out when we would be running it again.

Well, the big news is that we are now compiling our 2015 listing of the top women in the UK toy business – and we need you to get involved.

Produced once again in association with the Women In Toys body, the feature will recognise women from all areas of the UK toy business. It will be published in our May issue, and followed up by a networking lunch and awards ceremony at a Central London venue in July to rival last summer's.

Last year's listing saw marketeers, sales directors and PR execs rubbing shoulders with managing directors, entrepreneurs, inventors and retail buyers.

The feature is open to all women working in the UK toy industry – including all those who appeared in the 2014 listing.

HOW TO NOMINATE

The nomination period is open now – and you have until Monday March 23rd to suggest a colleague, a supplier, a customer or yourself to appear on the list.

If you know a woman in the business who has inspired and made a difference over the past 12 months, and deserves to be recognised, please nominate her by sending

details to **Samantha Loveday** at sloveday@nbmedia.com.

AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

This year, as well as the overall Woman of the Year accolade, we are expanding the networking event to include three new awards: Rising Star, Marketeer and Innovator of the Year.

The recipients from the four awards will be decided from the Women of the Year 2015 listing – voted for by the industry itself.

Further details on this – as well as the date and Central London venue for the event – will all be revealed soon, but for now make sure your choice is in the running by nominating by Monday March 23rd.



GERBIE QUILTER
SALES DIRECTOR,
VIVID & TOYNEWS
WOMAN OF THE YEAR
2014

"I feel really honoured to have received the first award. The day was a

great forum for peer to peer networking. It's valuable taking time out of a busy schedule to talk to colleagues, entrepreneurs and peers, and get insights into their issues and successes experienced from day to day and across their careers.

"It's great for women to be recognised in business. It's inspirational to have the spotlight on women across all levels; to share their trials and tribulations gives you a sense of what can be achieved here.

"I think there are lots of great, successful women in the toy industry, but I don't believe their success is highlighted. This is now changing thanks to some of the great initiatives."

ToyNews *Women* OF THE YEAR 2015



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Industry answers Minions call this year

"There'll be no shortage of Minions products this time around," UK toy retailers tell ToyNews



By Robert Hutchins

THE UK trade is fully primed for the success of *Minions* this year, with retailers confident in product levels ahead of the film's release this summer.

When *Despicable Me 2* rocketed to box office success in June 2013, some of the UK's biggest toy stores were left feeling the cold due to a 'complete lack of product' at retail.

With the *Minions* movie now scheduled for release on June 26th, the industry is keen not to see history repeat itself this time around.

"I feel that the industry is in a much better place this year than it was for either of the *Despicable Me* movies," Brian Simpson, general manager of ToyTown SMF, explained to *ToyNews*.

"Everyone was caught with their pants down last time, but now the characters are known and loved by all, the suppliers have caught on to this and have the products to match."

This time around, there is more than enough product to reflect the popularity of the *Minions* brand, according to The Entertainer's buying director, Stuart Grant.

"The *Minions* product line-up is very strong," he said. "*Minions* is our number one priority for the year."

Toymaster's MD, Ian Edmunds, added: "*Minions* will be much bigger than *Despicable Me* was. Having walked around Nuremberg and seen the 357 different backpacks that are available, and everything else, I am confident there is enough out there."

With expectations for the *Minions* franchise at such a high, it would be easy to over licence the product, but with carefully chosen lines, Universal appears to have avoided the issue, for now.

"There is a fine art to making product that actually enhances a licence, and Thinkway Toys' range of talkers is perfect

for the *Minions*," explained Steve Kerrison, owner of Kerrison Toys. "It looks like Universal protects the integrity of its brands very well, so far anyway."

However, Thinkway's approach to FOB shipping has the potential to divide some retailers.

"It seems to be frustrating to most indies, as product is only brought in by container loads," said ToyTown's Simpson.

"But equally, it means it doesn't end up damaging the brand," added Kerrison. "And with Mattel on board with *Minions* Mega Bloks, it could be massive."

Simpson concluded: "I am confident that *Minions* is here to stay; my hope is that they become an evergreen." www.minionsmovie.com



Rubie's soars again with double digit growth in '14

10 out of the 12 months of 2014 were the best firm has ever had

By **Samantha Loveday**

RUBIE'S IS continuing to post double digit percentage growth year on year, with 2014 proving no exception.

The firm enjoyed strong sales for Disney's *Frozen* Anna and Elsa dresses throughout last year, while Batman, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Star Wars* and *Transformers* also performed well.

Notably, December was Rubie's strongest on record and nearly double from previous years, while ten out of the 12 months of 2014 were the best the

firm has ever had. To top this all off, the firm picked up a Special Recognition accolade at the Toy Industry Awards in January.

"It's unusual for the dress-up category to be recognised in this way, so it was nice to see Rubie's commitment and success in supporting such a breadth of licensed characters for so many years gaining the recognition it did from the toy industry," Struan Robertson, trade marketing and digital marketing manager at Rubie's, told *ToyNews*.

The firm is now looking to forge even closer links with its independent toy retailer base, offering support via POS, promotional items and various other strategies to increase its serviceability. It will also continue to work closely with party, gift and fancy dress specialists.

And first up will be promotions around Book Week, says Robertson.

"[This] has become an important part of the year for us. We've especially been promoting our new Dennis The Menace range so far this year, as the book *The Diary of Dennis the Menace* is one of World Book Day's

£1 book on offer, so we hope that will give sales a boost."

Other focuses for Rubie's going forward will include the new Disney live action movie *Cinderella*, the next *Frozen* installment – *Frozen Fever* – *Minions* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, culminating in the arrival of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* in December.

"We want to continue growth in a year full of great new movies, and ensure we meet the needs of our customers and inspire our consumer with amazing costumes for all events," concluded Robertson.

Rubie's: 01491 826500



Now Tsum Tsum craze lands in UK

Disney looking to emulate success already enjoyed in Japan and US

By **Samantha Loveday**

DISNEY BELIEVES that its new Tsum Tsum range could rival the success of crazes such as Tamagotchi, Beanie Babies and Pokémon now it has arrived in the UK.

The toys are based on popular Disney characters and sold through Clintons stores, and have already shifted millions of units in Japan and the US.

They are supported with a *Candy Crush*-style game for iPhone and Android. As they progress through the game, players collect Tsums Tsums which then offer special abilities and in-game help.

Since launch the app has been downloaded more than 14 million times.

Pronounced 'tsoom tsoom' and translated from the Japanese meaning 'stack stack', Tsums Tsums are collectable toys of varying sizes that children place one on top of another.

"We're expecting a mad rush when the toys go on shelves here," commented Clintons' spokesperson Tim Fair. "This definitely brings back memories of Beanie Babies, Pokémon and Beyblades."

"Tsums Tsums have all the ingredients of a mammoth craze."

"They're based on well-loved Disney characters, they have a game to support them, there are different characters in different sizes and they're very appealing."

Disney: 020 8222 1000



Octonauts surfaces at CBeebies Land

Expansion into Alton Towers Resort will give further boost to popular pre-school brand

By **Samantha Loveday**

HIT PRE-SCHOOL property *Octonauts* will raise its profile further this year, thanks to a new attraction at CBeebies Land.

From Saturday, March 21st, youngsters can join Captain Barnacles and his crew on The Octonauts Rollercoaster Adventure.

Little thrill seekers on the My First Coaster will board a convoy of GUPs for a rescue mission with characters from the show. Through interactive elements,

children will be able to discover sea creatures and learn about some of the *Octonauts* missions as they take a tour of the Octopod.

"CBeebies Land has been a huge success with our younger guests in its first year, so we are really excited to be expanding and giving them more to do," said Katherine Duckworth, head of consumer marketing at Alton Towers Resort.

"Alton Towers Resort is renowned for its coasters and we wanted to create a new and exciting experience

for our little visitors, so have developed their very own first rollercoaster experience."

Thomas Merrington, VP brand and creative at Silvergate Media, added: "We are incredibly excited to be launching the first *Octonauts* rollercoaster at CBeebies Land. It will allow our legion of Octo-Cadets the chance to experience their favourite show in a brand new exhilarating way."

Mat Way, commercial director at BBC Worldwide, concluded: "We know that this brand new ride will bring

excitement and adventure for the whole family."

CBeebies Land already features attractions from

properties including *In The Night Garden* and *Mr Bloom*.

www.altontowers.com/cbeebiesland



Retailers carrying Big Hero 6 listings into Q4, says Bandai

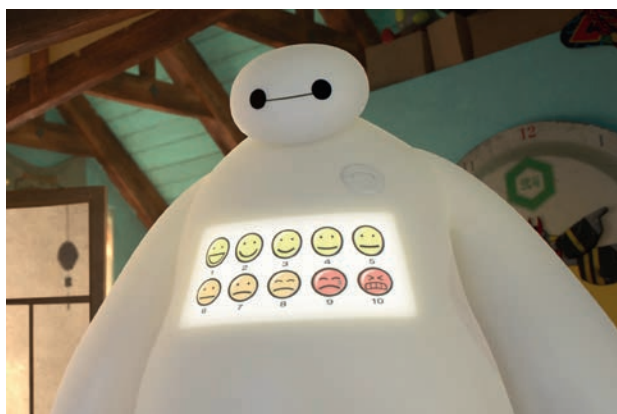
“As soon as our toy line hit the shelves in late December we knew we were onto something big”

By **Billy Langsworthy**

BIG HERO 6 spent its first two weeks on release at the top of the UK box office, and Bandai's range based on the Disney hit is enjoying similar success.

Bandai's toy line launched in late December and the firm has seen sales grow and grow ever since.

“As soon as our toy line hit the shelves in late December we saw excellent sell through and knew we were onto something big,” Bandai product manager Chris Pearce told *ToyNews*.



“When Disney's marketing campaign kicked in two weeks ahead of the movie launch, we saw sales double week on week and

now the movie has arrived its flying off the shelves.

“Retailers are seeing such strong sales they are carrying forward their

listings into autumn/winter which is really positive.”

Big Hero 6 was Disney Animation's first film after *Frozen*, and Bandai is confident that it can follow in its footsteps in becoming an evergreen toy brand, largely thanks to the sales spike often seen with the consequent DVD release.

“The DVD/Blu-ray release of the movie is scheduled for end of May, so we hope to see it resonate with fans and kids in a similar way Disney movies do (including

Frozen) when the home entertainment hits the market,” said Pearce.
Bandai: 01489 790944



‘Shaun the Sheep is one to watch,’ says Kids@Play

By **Robert Hutchins**

KIDS@PLAY IS investing heavily into *Shaun the Sheep* this year, with a portfolio of outdoor toys planned around the new movie, and more to follow in 2016.

Reaction to its new line of *Shaun the Sheep The Movie* children's inflatables has already been fantastic, according to the firm, which introduced the collection at London Toy Fair.

Shaun the Woolly Hopper – a lamb-inspired interpretation of the classic – and Shaun Plays Rugby, have both been billed by the firm as favourites within the range, thanks to the film's early success at box office.

From Aardman Studios, the animated feature has accrued £10.4 million across UK theatres, only three weeks since release on February 6th.

“*Shaun the Sheep* is certainly one to watch this year and I am confident it is going to be a big success,” Kids@Play MD and founder, Malcolm Evans told *ToyNews*.

“We are investing heavily into the brand this year, and for 2016 we are extending the range even further into outdoor, with products like Shaun the Sheep Bouncy Farm.”

Despite the film's strong start at box office, Evans reports that buyers are yet to catch up with the growing popularity of the franchise.

“To be honest, there is not a lot of product out there,” he continued.

“Buyers have been slow to take the *Shaun* brand on board, but then they were slow to support another movie... *Frozen*.”

Kids@Play:
01291 635551



Street Cat Bob primed for licensing

By **Samantha Loveday**

BOB, THE street cat that changed the life of a homeless busker and became a publishing sensation to boot, is set to make the move into the toy space.

Independent licensing agency TPA has been appointed by Aitken Alexander Associates as the EMEA licensing agent for Bob and his owner James Bowen.

Initial product areas being eyed up include plush, giftware and posters, while the brand also has potential in games and jigsaws.

A comprehensive style guide is now in development, with first product launches expected to take place later this year.

A *Street Cat Named Bob* has now sold over a million copies in the UK, and has topped the charts in the US, Germany, Brazil, Portugal and Turkey.

More Bob books have followed and enjoyed similar success.

“Bob is an inspirational figure with strong name recognition, lasting appeal and a potential that extends into many product categories,” said Chris Taday, MD of TPA.

TPA: 07921 280206



THANK YOU



A **big thank you** to exhibitors and visitors to Toy Fair 2015 for making it such a successful show. We will update you on the dates for next year as soon as we can and hope to welcome you next year at Olympia.

Wishing you a prosperous year ahead.

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Pre-School

A monthly guide dedicated to the biggest sector in toys

Hardenberg&Co enters toy space with Sassy Baby brand

"It's great to enter the toy sector with a property of such calibre," MD Julie Ebrey tells ToyNews

By Billy Langsworthy

HARDENBERG&CO IS entering the toy space after signing a deal to become the UK and Ireland's official distributor for Sassy Baby Toys.

The firm, one of the UK's leading distributors of baby products, will be launching the Sassy toy collection on the Hardenberg&Co stand at Harrogate International Toy Fair 2015.

Hardenberg&Co believes the new Sassy brand has the potential to create a real buzz within the UK's pre-school sector.

"Sassy is a strong brand and has excelled within the toy industry since 1996," Julie Ebrey, MD at Hardenberg&Co, told *ToyNews*. "By becoming the official UK & Ireland distributor for Sassy, it

allows us to offer the UK market a brand of superior quality and one that stands out from the competition.

"The toys have become a fast favourite with parents, babies and retailers. We really are delighted to welcome Sassy into the H&Co product portfolio and are keen to build upon the UK presence it already has. It will definitely create a buzz within the UK and sits perfectly amongst our existing award-winning brands too. It's great to enter the toy sector with a brand of such calibre."

Hardenberg&Co also believes that the brand's focus on inspiring and developing baby's senses will help it stand out from the competition.

"Sassy provide affordable and quality toys set to bring the toybox to life

with its unique approach," added Ebrey. "The toys are designed to develop senses at the right time and are split into Touch, Hear, Taste and Vision categories to allow the parent to have fun while hitting important developmental milestones.

"All toys are researched and designed by child development experts, meaning parents can rest assured that the toys will not only be fun for baby, but will also help to develop each of their senses at the right time.

"The Sassy collection provides a refreshing reassurance; quality products with specific features to make the brand truly stand out from other toy brands in the UK."

Hardenberg&Co:
01785 503305



Toy firms "flooding in" for Harrogate International Nursery Fair

By Billy Langsworthy

HARROGATE INTERNATIONAL Nursery Fair has seen a raft of pre-school toy and gift exhibitors signing up for the show.

Alongside returning companies like 1 Two Kids, East Coast Nurseries, Halilit and B Kids UK, new www.toynews-online.biz

exhibitors will include Casdon Toys, Golden Bear and Rainbow Designs.

"We now have over 40 toy and gift related companies signed up to exhibit at the show and booking forms are still flowing in," Adrian Sneyd, the show's organiser, told *ToyNews*.

"This is great news all round – nursery retailers

looking for add on ranges will have plenty of choice; while toy retailers will definitely find lots of new pre-school ranges, as well as baby related products which fit perfectly in a toy retail setting."

Harrogate International Nursery Fair takes place from March 29th to 31st. www.nurseryfair.com



Comment

A trade show organiser's view



Adrian Sneyd, show organiser for Harrogate International Nursery Fair, explains how he ensures the show keeps up with changing consumer buying habits.

THERE HAS been a notable shift in direction for a number of UK trade shows in recent years.

Industry lines appear to be crossing and show visitors at industry specific trade events are increasingly faced with new and unexpected product ranges.

This is certainly true for Harrogate International Nursery Fair, which has seen a significant increase in toy and gift exhibitors filling the ever growing demand for these products in the nursery retail setting.

With consumer buying habits changing rapidly in recent years, retailers across the board are having to re-evaluate their stock lines and this is largely reflected in the diverse selection of products available at the show.

In turn, a new cross section of visitors are also attending the event, as savvy independent toy and gift retailers are cashing in on the one-stop-shop culture, seeking out eye-catching baby products which will sit comfortably on their toy shelves.

With large retail parks popping up all across the UK, not to mention the supermarket chains and online shopping sites, consumers expect to be able to purchase everything they need at once and they are demanding quality and choice.

However, rather than viewing this change in

buying habit as a threat to business, many independent retailers are cashing in on the culture by developing a holistic approach with their stock lines and consequently for many, business is booming.

This year, Harrogate International Nursery Fair has almost 40 companies exhibiting ranges of toys and gift items – and this is great news not only for nursery retailers, but for toy buyers too.

The pre-school toy market is very different to the general toy market in that purchase decisions are generally made by the adult carer, with educational value and quality a priority and they are prepared to pay for it.

Often, the line between what is considered a toy and what is considered a baby comforter or accessory is hazy, so retailers stocking a good selection of both pre-school toys and lower price point baby products are more likely to get a bigger bite of the cherry, whether they are in a toy or nursery retail setting.

One thing is for certain: babies are big business and parents, particularly when it comes to first-time parents, are captive audiences where new baby products ranges and accessories are concerned.

In conclusion, adding cute baby goods to the pre-school toy shelf can pretty much guarantee a steady stream of impulse purchases throughout the whole year.

Harrogate International Nursery Fair takes place from March 29th to 31st 2015 at the Harrogate International Centre – visit www.nurseryfair.com for full information.

Gowi planning 20% increase in its anniversary year

Austrian toy maker is celebrating 190th birthday in 2015

By **Billy Langsworthy**

GOWI TOYS is celebrating its 190th birthday this year, and the Austrian firm believes constant improvement is the secret to its remarkable longevity.

Founded in 1825 in Graz, Gowi is the oldest still existing toy company in Austria and its hits include the famous toy tea sets which have been a bestseller in the UK since the 1960s.

"The secret is to improve constantly," Marco Paul, head of international sales at Gowi Toys, told *ToyNews*.

"Gowi is well known for good designs and very good quality. That requires investing in good designers and good injection molds."

Having started life with a small metal workshop in Graz in 1825, the company



has had to change with the times more than once.

"The industry has changed a lot," added Paul. "Gowi switched the production from metal to plastic pretty early. The oldest plastic toy which we have in our showroom is from 1958.

"Furthermore, it got more complicated to work as a small toy manufacturer because the requirements regarding toy safety

standards are very high. That's just one advantage of big companies compared with companies of our size."

And through it all, the company has maintained high standards, with big plans for 2015.

Paul continued: "The last year was stable. We had a slight increase in 2014, but for this year we're planning a 20 per cent increase."

BigJigs: 01303 250400

Learning Resources targets outdoor growth

By **Samantha Loveday**

LEARNING RESOURCES is aiming to promote active learning and adventures outdoors with a raft of new products in the category this year.

Perfect for little explorers, the Primary Science Big View Binoculars (£9.95) are aimed at ages three and up.

Made from strong, durable plastic, the binoculars feature soft rubber eyepieces, an easy turn focusing wheel and 6x magnification, while also including a safe, breakable lanyard to ensure that, even

when on the go, they never lose focus.

The binoculars are the latest introduction to Learning Resources' Primary Science collection, which it says has everything budding young scientists need to start to get to grips with the world of science. The range is perfect for introducing children to basic scientific concepts, including real working equipment and sturdy well-sized tools.

In addition, Learning Resources will also be

introducing the GeoSafari Jr Science Utility Vehicle (£15.95). Designed to tackle even the toughest of tracks, the mobile magnifying truck can manoeuvre through terrain such as carpet, grass and soil.

The colourful 20cm wide x 13cm tall truck features a 3x magnifier and focusing knob, as well as red and white LED lights for day or night-time discovery.

The firm believes that the new addition to the GeoSafari Jr range is a perfect companion to its best selling Underwater Explorer Boat. Also for ages three and up, the model 'glass bottom boat' has a transparent floor with 3x magnification for easy underwater viewing.

Learning Resources: 0155 381 9382



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UK retail braced for 'strongest movie line-up in years'

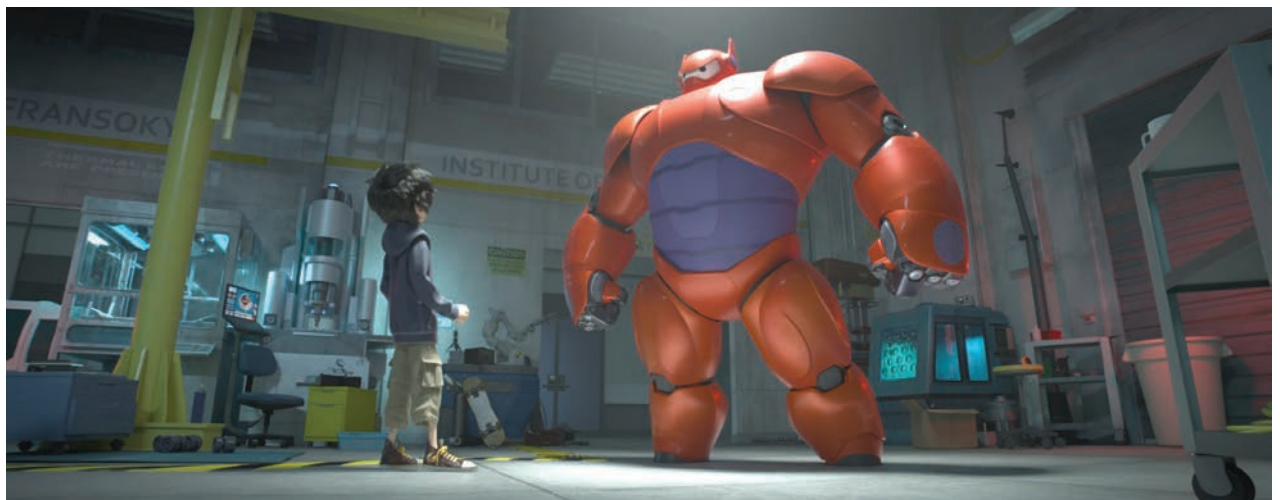
From Star Wars: The Force Awakens and Minions to Bing! and The Clangers, our Retail Advisory Board believes that strong film and TV licences will help the industry to another successful year

By Robert Hutchins

GROWING CONSUMER confidence and the 'strongest movie line-up in years' will help the toy industry surpass the success of 2014, according to this month's Retail Advisory Board.

Earmarked by the triumph of Loom Bands and Disney's *Frozen*, last year saw overall UK toy sales grow by four per cent, while many of the country's leading toy retailers confirm ending the year in a 'very strong position.'

Now, with the likes of *Cinderella*, *Minions*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Star Wars: The Force*



with *Big Hero 6* already performing really well. Then we have *Avengers*, *Home* and *SpongeBob* all pre-Easter, followed by

that the industry is going to have a great year."

Neil Mitchell, toy buyer at Shop Direct, added: "There was a definite air of optimism at Toy Fair this year, and I see no reason why the market should not outperform the four per cent growth achieved in 2014, especially with a constant stream of movies from March to December."

From online retailers carrying some of the more eclectic collectables, to High Street stores specialising in pre-school lines, the optimism is widespread amongst retailers.

Xbite's Karla Mitchell and Boots' buying manager of children's gift and nursery, Martyn Bradley

both share opinions on this year's licensed toys line-up.

"I think autumn/winter 2015 will be dominated by film and TV licences," said Bradley. "Obviously, *Star Wars* and *Avengers* will top the bill, but we have seen some great new pre-school licenses such as *Bing* and *The Clangers*, too."

"Early predictions will have to be the usual," added Xbite's Mitchell.

"LEGO, *Star Wars* and VTech will all be in the top ten, and film releases will have a very positive impact this year."

However, not all were bowled over by the selection on offer this year, and despite his positive start to the year,

ToyTown's Brian Simpson left Toy Fair season feeling underwhelmed with the year's initial product line-up.

"The only new ranges that are shining at present are *Paw Patrol* and *Big Hero 6*," he said.

"However, there is a lot to come in 2015 and *Thunderbirds*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Minions* and more will help things pick up naturally.

"We see Shopkins as the new Moshi Monsters, but for me, the most impactful licences will be linked to movies, and *Thunderbirds*."

"If I were to pick my own Toy of the Year, it would be Tracey Island from the *Thunderbirds* range," he concluded.

We have an incredible movie slate ahead of us, with Big Hero 6 already performing really well.

Stuart Grant, The Entertainer

Awakens scheduled to hit cinemas this year, sales are expected to rise again.

"2015 is going to be a really good year for the trade and The Entertainer in particular," Stuart Grant, buying director at The Entertainer, told *ToyNews*.

"We have an incredible movie slate ahead of us,

Minions and of course *Star Wars*, which will both be huge.

"The licensing line-up looks really strong, and from a movie perspective, we will have one of our strongest years as an industry. Coupled with the growing return of consumer confidence, I am positive

ToyNews
RETAIL ADVISORY BOARD

ToyNews takes soundings from its Retail Advisory Board on toy industry issues. The current members are:



Stuart Grant,
The Entertainer



Fiona
Murray-Young,
Toys R Us



Linzi Walker,
Argos



Brian Simpson,
Toytown



Clare Barton,
Sainsbury's



Neil Mitchell,
Shop Direct



Annalise Quest,
Harrods



Steph Strike,
Asda



Ben Redhead,
Firebox



Alphonse
Madamombe,
Maplin



Helen Gourley,
Toy Hub



Miles Penhallow,
Play-Room



Karla Mitchell,
XBite

What do you find most useful about toy fairs?

With toy fair season done and dusted for 2015, **ToyShop UK** asks its listers why they flock to London, Nuremberg and Birmingham every year



Jonathon Rogers
David Rogers Toymaster
"Often there is a wee deal to encourage an order."

Tracie Peacock-Quinney
Ella's Toy Shop
"We use the toy fairs as not only a chance to source new suppliers and products, but as a training ground for our staff. By staff looking and talking to the suppliers, they can hear first hand how to sell the products and how to demonstrate them. The staff also get a chance to ask questions about

other products that we may not stock, and give their feedback at the end of the show of products as to how they might be considered for the future. The fairs are valuable to us all."

Linda Ladley
EcoToyStore
"I always attend with a view to meeting current and potential new suppliers."

Jane Sheldrake
East Anglian Hobbies
"Toy fairs are an opportunity to meet

suppliers face to face, which for small businesses who do not see sales reps, it's great to make that contact. Seeing all the products displayed is also very inspiring."

Sam Haggett
Moving Pictures
"We have always attended Toy Fair and Spring Fair since opening our shop. There is nothing like seeing products for real as pictures can be misleading and can lead to spending money on an item that you are unhappy with."

Every year we go, we have managed to find at least one new supplier which we would never have if not attending the show. Yes, it costs money to travel there but it is valuable and this year we persuaded friends who own a shop to go. They found items they are already stocking but cheaper through another supplier, thus automatically increasing their profits this year."

Caroline Hubbard
Hubbard's Toy Cupboard
"Finding exciting new



Toy Shop UK is a consumer-led, online directory that helps toy suppliers, retailers and licence holders promote their businesses to an audience of up to 10,000 unique visitors per day.

Popular weekly giveaways, the esteemed Independent Toy Awards and special supplier listings are just three of the ways that Toy Shop UK can help you increase your online presence and complement your other marketing

activities this year. Contact ■ Michael Hawkins (michael@toyshopuk.co.uk or 07786 295756) for more information.

www.toyshopuk.co.uk



TOY FAIR season is over for another year, and chances are some of you hopped from London to Nuremberg to Birmingham. Some may have even stopped off at New York more recently.

Now the dust has settled on the fairs, ToyShop UK has asked its listers what they find most useful about them, with product hunting, trend spotting and networking coming out on top.

A mighty 86 per cent of those asked claimed that finding new products was the most useful part of going to the shows.

"There is nothing like seeing products for real as pictures can be misleading and can lead to spending money on an item that you are unhappy with," says Sam Haggett, owner of Moving Pictures.

"Every year we go, we have managed to find at least one new supplier which we would never have if not attending the show."

Caroline Hubbard of Hubbard's Toy Cupboard adds: "Finding exciting new products and meeting with potential new suppliers is so easy at the toy fairs.

"This is critical to us keeping our stock fresh,

both in the shop and for sale online."

Elsewhere, eight per cent of listers stated that trend spotting was the highlight of show season.

"We are always on the look out for new products, or that something different that could spark a new range, but it is vital to get a feel for the year's trends and which licensed products and films are getting advertising spend or creating lots of noise. It's also good to meet suppliers old and new," Thingimijigs' Rachael White tells ToyShop UK.

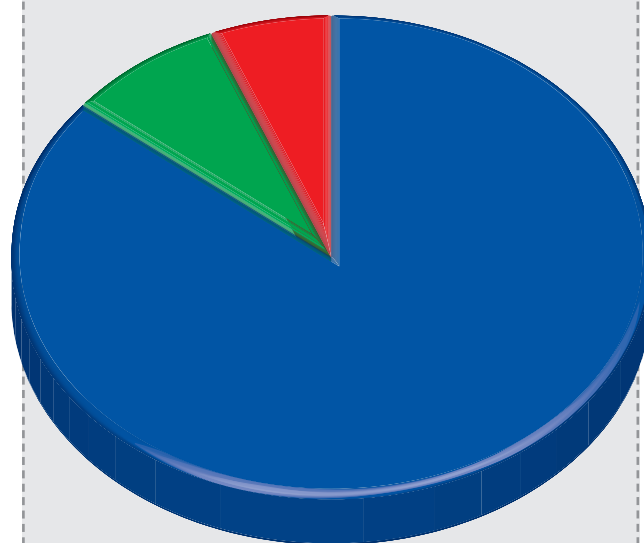
Only six per cent told ToyShop UK that the highlight of January's toy fair season was the networking aspect.

"Toy fairs are an opportunity to meet suppliers face to face, which for small businesses who do not see sales reps, it is great to make that contact," says Jane Sheldrake from East Anglian Hobbies.

"Seeing all the products displayed is also very inspiring."

Linda Ladley of EcoToyStore adds: "I always attend with a view to meeting current and potential new suppliers."

WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST USEFUL ABOUT TOY FAIRS?



- 86% = Finding new products
- 8% = Trend spotting
- 6% = Networking

products and meeting potential new suppliers is so easy at the toy fairs. This is critical to us keeping our stock fresh, both in the shop and for sale online."

Amanda Alexander
Giddy Goat Toys
"I like to look at new products 'in the flesh'. You get a better idea than from seeing them in a catalogue or online. I also like to investigate potential new suppliers and catch up with current suppliers."

Victoria Holmes
Pooky
"I find it useful to see new products from my existing suppliers. I can see the actual size, colours and how they sit with other products that they sell. You can visualise them in your shop much better."

Colin Tindall
Rainbow Gifts
"I struggled to find anything new and exciting this year. Very much keeping with existing suppliers and building on their new products."

Robert Williams
Silly Billy's Toy Shop
"Toy fairs give me the ability to see the product first hand as opposed to viewing new products in catalogues or on a computer screen."

Rachael White
Thingimijigs
"We are always on the look out for new products, or that something different that could spark a new range, but it is vital to get a feel for the year's trends and which licensed products and films are

getting advertising spend or creating lots of noise. It's also good to meet suppliers old and new."

Nigel Clark
Toy Dome
"I tend to find suppliers do the opposite to what you agree at the trade show. Anything to grab a sale."

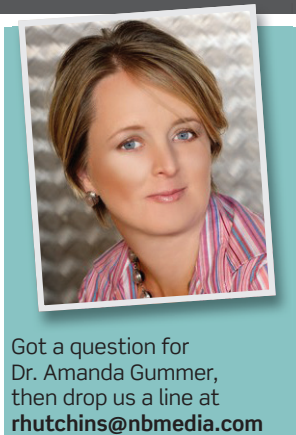


Joy riding

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



In our new series of features, we put your questions to the industry's resident Doctor. This month, a ride-on toy inventor asks how to offer a wide play value



Got a question for Dr. Amanda Gummer, then drop us a line at rhutchins@nbmedia.com

FOUNDER OF the Good Toy Guide, CEO of Fundamentally Children and child psychologist, Dr. Amanda Gummer has been answering our questions for a number of years now.

So, we decided it was time we allowed you to ask the industry's resident Doctor the questions that mattered the most to you.

This month, a toy inventor puts Dr. Gummer's knowledge to the test.

I am an aspiring inventor working on a design for a pre-school ride-on. Education isn't the prime concern of my latest design, so how can I make sure the toy still offers a wide play value?

At Fundamentally Children, we believe in giving children a balanced Play Diet – getting the right balance between toys that are primarily educational, and toys that have more fun value.

A toy doesn't need to be educational to have wide play value – there are much more important skills at pre-school age that a ride-on toy can help develop than learning to read, write or count.

Good emotional and social development provides important



A toy doesn't need to be educational to have wide play value.

Amanda Gummer, Fundamentally Children

groundwork for the child to be able to learn once they start school.

Three year olds are just starting to learn about sharing, so toys that promote turn taking (such as ride-ons) are great

practice for this. Children can learn to negotiate with each other, and being able to share fairly creates a foundation to form new friendships with their peers, as they start to build their own social network.

Some children with special educational needs can struggle with social skills, so it is important to help them develop these skills as early as possible.

Ride-ons also encourage children to be physically active, which is great for their health, strengthening their muscles and developing coordination and gross motor skills.

Themed ride-ons, such as vehicles and animals provide the opportunity

for role-play as well, so children can pretend to be a police officer as they ride around in their 'police car'.

Role-play allows children to act out scenarios they have experienced in order to make sense of them: a child pretending to be a police officer might practice maintaining the rules of the playground.

Exercising their imagination in this way allows them to think creatively, too.

CONTACT THE GOOD TOY GUIDE:

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Toys N Tuck

Toys N Tuck has been delighting Southend residents with quality toys for over ten years and January saw the store crowned Independent Toy Retailer of the Year. **Robert Hutchins** talks to owner, Alan Dadswell



Can you tell us a bit about your store?

We are situated in Southend town centre, and while we do not have a specific remit to be 'different', we do try to make sure that we stand out.

Situated on Queens Road in Southend, our 3,000 square feet store has the largest display of Schleich animals and accessories in the area, along with dedicated areas for LEGO, Playmobil, Melissa and Doug and more.

Our Southend store also stocks a large range of Hornby trains and Scalextric racing sets.

The store is known as the local collectors centre for these and we offer a discount to Hornby collectors club members.

However, with so much on offer, we still make sure that our store is neat, clean and tidy, hopefully making it easier for mothers with buggies to get around the store, while making sure they are exposed to as much

product as possible by avoiding straight lines.

What got you guys into selling toys and games?

We established the business in 1993. I have spent most of my working life in retail, but I just sort of fell into toys.

What kind of toys do you stock and what is selling well at the moment?

We are a mainstream Toymaster High Street retailer, so it is essential that we have a good range of the most popular toys. Selling well for us at the moment are LEGO Minecraft, Turtles, Paw Patrol and Shopkins. These are all really flying.

How do you engage with your local community and customers?

We use Facebook a lot to help promote our events and we always have competitions and demonstrations running during all school holidays. We also have a customer loyalty scheme.

What does being named Independent Toy Retailer of the Year 2014 mean to Toys N Tuck?

It is very nice to be recognised and makes our people feel good which hopefully gives us a good start.

What products are you looking forward to stocking this year?

Toy Fair 2015 presented a lot of little things that could add up to a reasonable amount. I really

liked the I Do 3D from Flair, *Minions* movie products and of course, *Star Wars*.

What online operations do you have?

We have been trading online for over ten years through our online arm, Toys N Fun.

Our online business tends to specialise in quality ranges where we can offer good products at competitive prices along with our unrivalled customer service.

What do you think will be the big sellers of this year?

Easy. *Minions*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, Shopkins, Dinosaurs, *Minecraft*, all Marvel products, and did I mention *Star Wars*?

What's next for you guys over the next 12 months?

We are looking to develop our marketing with our loyalty scheme and to re-design our website to include a Click and Collect facility.





This month, it's arcades and ice creams aplenty as **Mystery Shopper** takes a trip to the seaside to visit Southend's toy stores in search of a present for their three year old niece



NUMBER ONE – CHILDREN’S BOOKS AND TOYS

1 West Street, Rochford, SS4 1BE

NO BIGGER than a shoebox, Rochford's Number One offers pre-school lines from puzzles and play-sets to role-play and plush animals, while stocking an array of children's books.

"We have plenty of sale items in the next room, too," smiled the friendly shopkeeper.

I peered into what looked like a community hall. Lining the room were tables of toys, from Princess craft kits and Hama Beads to Hello Kitty Mega Bloks.

An effigy of Jesus hung on the wall, beneath which was a selection of traditional wooden toys.

"Someone makes these locally, and we sell them for him," said the woman.

"We usually hold family activities in this room."

I asked the chatty woman if she could suggest a present for my niece and within seconds she was clambering through the window displays.

"This never goes out of fashion," she said handing

me a box of 35 Little Miss story books.

"And this Hello Kitty oven is only £14.99 and beautiful."

I hinted towards the arts and craft kits, and she leapt to the shop's selection of sticker books.

"These are all lovely," she informed me.

"We have dinosaurs, animals, princesses, all sorts of themes. These are all great kits for both mum and baby to do together."

Job done.

Verdict: What Number One lacks in the latest licences, it makes up for in its dedication to the local customer and community. The store's staff are passionate, friendly and accommodating and ready to go the extra mile for its local shopper. Number One is a gem of the local area.

4/5



WATERSTONES

49-51 High Street, Southend, SS1 1HZ

GUESS HOW Much I Love You, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, and the adorable 'snout' of a Moomin, all greeted me from the shelves of Waterstones' pre-school section.

Half term had swept through the shop like a tornado, and many of the plush toys and licensed puzzles were left looking rather disheveled where they stood.

Despite this, the store had plenty to offer, with a range of play-sets, educational toys and arts and craft kits all tied to some of the most popular children's books of today.

Road Dahl gift sets, *Gruffalo* plush and *The Hungry Caterpillar* puzzles led the store's array of toys.

I decided to enlist the help of the first store assistant

I could find. I wandered the entire shop before I was eventually successful.

"Oh, you've asked the wrong person there," said the young lady.

"I wouldn't even know what kids are in to at that age."

My heart sank, but, perhaps foolishly, I persisted.

We were stood in the 'Things to make and do' section of the store, boasting various kits, from Make your own Puppets to Design a Princess.

"She loves princesses," I offered. Still nothing.

"I really wouldn't know, I am very sorry," said the assistant. She was gracious and friendly, but it was clear this transaction was going nowhere fast.

Verdict: Waterstones boasts a fantastic selection of pre-school lines. It was a shame then, that in this instance, it was all hugely undersold. Having said that, the service was still friendly if somewhat lacking in product knowledge.

2/5



STAR
STORE

TOYS 'N' TUCK

1A Queens Road, Southend on Sea

PICTURE A supermarket designed by children, and there's a chance that Toys 'N' Tuck isn't far off.

Filled with Sylvanian Families, *Frozen* toys, dolls, action figures, and many more, the store is laid out so that it is almost impossible to leave without seeing the whole lot. It's clear that someone here knows shopping habits.

Following the carefully constructed route through the shop, I passed a LEGO statue of Yoda and a wall of Marvel figures before I eventually arrived at the pre-school toys. After a few minutes of perusing, I approached the till to ask for assistance.

"This 'create you own puppet' set is quite popular," explained the store

assistant. "They'd need supervision of course, but it's a lovely kit, or this Paint a Duck is quite sweet." I had to agree that it was.

"Oh, actually, we have some lovely sets over here." She led me over to a selection of traditional looking wooden toys. "She can make her own jewellery box and decorate it."

A moment later, the woman had disappeared and I was left staring into the big eyes of an unpainted duck. Minutes later, she was back bearing a colouring book.

"This book lets kids colour the pictures in using water, it's mess free, and means they can use it unsupervised." It was a superb selection.

Verdict: With in-store theatre, Disney tunes on the sound system and a wide range of products on offer, Toys 'N' Tuck seems to have it all. The customer service was friendly, helpful and knowledgeable, making this Southend store well worth a visit.

5/5

SUMMARY

This month's trip to a mix of independent retailers with big name chain stores highlighted the power of good customer service.

While Rochford's Number One might not be big enough to pick up the newest licences in the pre-school sector, its passion for toys and its community helped deliver an excellent shopping experience.

And when it comes to competition, it is clear that product knowledge is key.

Toys 'N' Tuck comes out on top this month, championed by Mystery Shopper for attention to detail and dedication to customer care, pipping Argosy Toys to the post of Star Store.

Waterstones found itself let down by product knowledge, but maintains points for its friendly environment, while Early Learning Centre takes this month's booby prize for its stunning lack of enthusiasm, losing custom in the process.



ARGOSY TOYS

553 London Road, Westcliff on Sea, SS0 9LL

WITH A sign on the door reading: 'Wow, I never knew this shop was so big,' and a giant giraffe in its window, Argosy Toys lets the store speak for itself.

Aisles filled with the latest LEGO sets, Marvel action figures, *Frozen* play-sets, *Big Hero 6*, and board games stretched the two rooms.

Inside, half term was in full swing, and the store

appeared to be a Mecca for pushchairs, mothers and very excitable children. And attending to their every question was the store manager, a man with the swagger of a rock star and the hair cut to match.

He had just finished demonstrating the workings of a microscope while haggling with a five year old over a box of Star Wars

LEGO, when I approached with my own demand.

"Yes sir, all the arts and crafts kits you could need are situated here," he said leading me to an alcove of creative sets.

"Water Magic is a popular choice and of course, anything *Frozen*, like this *Frozen* jewel set," he added, pointing out a selection of popular items.

Verdict: Argosy boasts a superb range of products, covering all price points within both traditional and licensed toys. The owner had an excellent rapport with his customers, and was a popular figure within the shop. Attention with this mystery shopper was limited, but understandable in the busy environment. Perhaps more staff on the floor is in order in peak times.

4/5



EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

173 High Street, Southend, SS1 1LL

"HOW OLD is she?" asked the lady behind the till. "Oh, yes, they are all suitable for three year olds," she added. She even nearly smiled as she did so.

Closing time was approaching as I entered Southend High Street's Early Learning Centre, and any enthusiasm had clearly been drained.

From behind her till, the woman pointed to the wall behind me. "Yes, that's the whole selection of arts and craft lines, there."

I asked her if there was anything she would suggest. I needn't have bothered.

"The stuff to the right is for 18 months and up, so that could be a bit young, but other than that..." she trailed off.

It was a nice selection, but with the knowledge gleaned from Toys 'N' Tuck, I knew that water drawing kits were ideal for unsupervised play.

So I decided to leave and see if I could find it online.

Verdict: Time and again Mystery Shopper has reported on the benefits of good customer service, and this trip to ELC proved that once again, the independents have it right. The product on offer was high quality, but it was let down by poor customer service.

1/5



All of our products either come assembled or are easy to assemble, designed with special care for a child's safety, comfort, joy and pleasure.

JNH Europe Ltd. 7 Agecroft Trading Estate, Langley Road, Salford M6 6JD. UK Tel: 0161-737-1881 www.jnheurope.com

Our new brands **2015** collection:



The great outdoors

It may not be as weather dependent as it once was, but the outdoor and sports toys category still traditionally has two peaks – May to July and December. It's a robust sector though, worth £346.8 million in 2014 according to NPD – that's up seven per cent on 2013. **Samantha Loveday** takes a look at just some of the new lines coming up this year

RE:CREATION

Re:creation is blazing a trail in the outdoor arena with new launches from Razor and performance launcher brand, Air Storm.

This year, Air Storm welcomes the FireTek range, featuring LED lights, FireTek Rocketz and soon-to-launch FireTek Zeon Bow and FireTek Z-Curve Bows. Fire the bungee launched FireTek Rocketz as high as 76 metres, while the light-up Z-Curve Bow can launch illuminated arrows over 40 metres. The Air Storm brand will receive

support from a 360 degree marketing campaign including extensive TV, online with an app-based game and PR support, as well as various in-store demos throughout the year.



Katy Fletcher,
Brand Manager,
Outdoor,
Re:creation

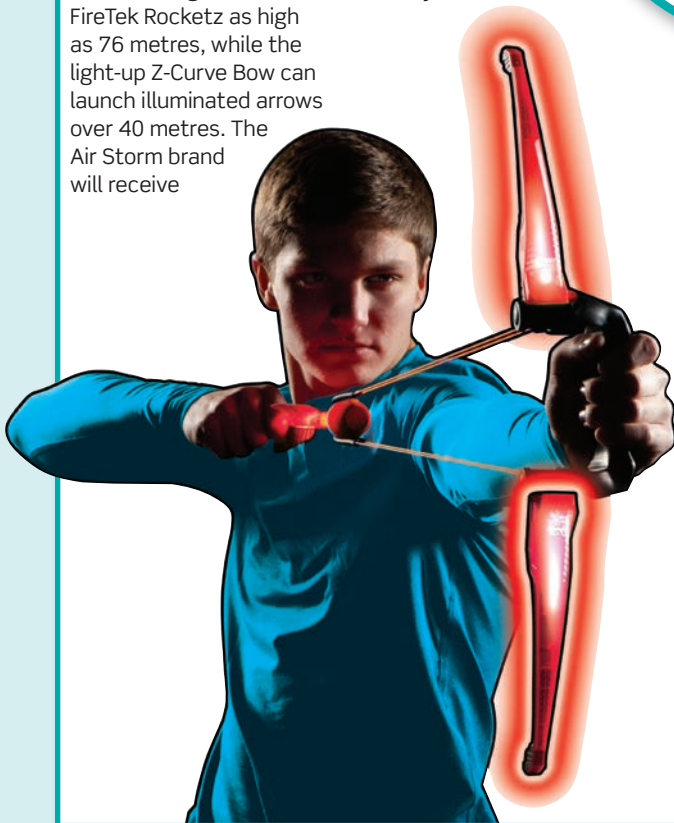
"Blasters and launchers continue to be high on the agenda, but to maintain interest innovation in this area is increasingly important. Our new light up FireTek products from Air Storm deliver on this and have already proven themselves strong performers in the US."

Kick and stunt scooters remain at the heart of Razor's offering and the Party Pop Scooter delivers a light-up deck for party style.

Meanwhile, the RX200 will join Razor's electric scooter portfolio and comes with a high torque motor and off-road robust, 60 psi pneumatic tyres.

The award-winning Crazy Cart is joined by the Crazy Cart XL and the Lil' Crazy. Razor Junior also introduces the Mini Mod – a pre-school take on the Pocket Mod. Available in Pink and Green, the Mini Mod can hit 2mph.

Re:creation will continue its commitment to TV investment throughout the year and the E100 and E90 electric scooters will receive their first spring TV support. **0118 973 6222**



SBYKE

Fresh from the United States, Sbyke is the next step in scooter evolution and the hottest new transport craze. The revolutionary new scooter features unique rear-steer technology, which gives the rider the sensation of skiing or snowboarding, without leaving the ground.

The hybrid bike-scooter combines the very best elements from the world of BMX and skateboarding and its radical design lets riders steer using bodyweight. A hit with fans of scooters, boards and bikes, once they've mastered the simple riding style, there are endless tricks to try on the Sbyke which is already a huge 'hit in the

pits' across the pond – and certain to take the UK by storm, says the firm.

Sbyke offers the ease and manoeuvrability of rear steering, a hand brake for control and the stability of a wide hardwood maple deck which allows for side-by-side foot placement. Crafted from high quality materials such as aircraft-grade aluminium, the Sbyke is rugged and durable and boasts a sleek, eye-catching design.

There are two Sbyke models in the series: the P20 Sbyke, with 20" BMX wheel for ages eight and up (£149.95) and the smaller P16 Sbyke for ages four to seven (£99.95).

0800 566 8849



D'ARPEJE

D'Arpeje enjoyed a successful toy trade fair season and will be looking to build on its presence in the outdoor space further in 2015.

The firm continues to develop its *Frozen* range, with successful products including the 3-wheel Flex Scooter, protection sets, in-line skates and two and three-wheel scooters.

For 2015, young fans will be able to boost their collection with the firm's line-up of adjustable quads for children aged three and upwards, bike accessories sold in sets or individually, containing gloves, a water bottle, helmet, bell and basket, as well as a ten-inch cross scooter for children aged six and above.

D'Arpeje will also continue

its collaboration with Marvel by offering a wide outdoor range for *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Two-wheel scooters have been designed so that children aged five and above can ride with their favourite super heroes.

All of the collection offers products with adjustable handlebars, rear brake and printed non-slip deck for safety. A carrying strap and

sparkling mechanism also allow the creation of sparks each time the child brakes. A skateboard which has been adapted for beginners completes the wheeled toys collection, while protective sets have also been designed.

+33(0)47879 6050





Nikki Jeffery,
Marketing Manager,
Famosa

FEBER (FAMOSA)

Spanish outdoor specialist, Feber has rationalised its product range into three categories – battery ride-ons, foot-to-floor and outdoor – in easily identifiable red, blue and green colour-coded new packaging concepts.

Hero products for 2015 are the 6V Range Rover, Roadstar Venture, the Ferrari FF, the Modern House and the Baby Evolution Easy Trike. All of these are held in Famosa's UK warehouse for immediate delivery to quickly satisfy growing customer demand.

Available in May, the new replica Range Rover 6V is powered by a 6-volt motor, has forward and reverse gears, an accelerator and electric brake for ultimate cruising in style.

With a sleek black body, stylish alloy wheels and wing mirrors, the Range Rover 6V is a dream come true for kids at an affordable

price over its more powerful bigger brother, the 12V Range Rover Sport.

Suitable from three years old, the guide retail price of the Feber Range Rover 6V is £199.99.

The new Roadstar Venture (£99.99), available in June, is a new entry-level battery operated car from Feber. With aggressive, sleek sporting looks, the bright red Roadstar Venture will appeal to the 'racer' in the infant. Again, suitable from three years, the Roadstar Venture is fuelled by a battery-powered 6V motor and also features forward and reverse gears, a foot accelerator and electric brake. It comes complete with battery and charger.

Other licensed ride-ons performing well are the 6V Cars 2 Lightning McQueen (£149.99), the 6V single-seater Ferrari FF (£179.99) and the 12V two-seater Ferrari California (£279.99).

Famosa's Nikki Jeffery says: "As with all toys, licences from top brand names inevitably help sales and enhance toy brand credibility. The Feber

"Feber is still establishing a brand presence in the UK, but the outlook for the brand looks promising with the Ferrari FF, the Minnie Car and Cars 2 Lightning McQueen battery ride-ons proving particularly popular last year."

Cars 2 Lightning McQueen is a classic case in point, as the Disney licensed toy is one of our best selling hero products."

Safety, comfort and innovation are overriding design features found in all Feber toys and they are all backed up by an unrivalled spare parts service for customers. **01623 237433**



BANANAGRAMS

The must-have outdoor games for summer 2015, Jumbo Bananagrams and Jumbo ZIP-IT promise hours of wordplay fun, whatever the weather. While the innovative, supersized versions of two of Bananagrams' bestselling word games are perfect for family outdoor play in the garden, at the beach, in the playground or in the park, they're both equally great fun for rainy-day play at home or in the classroom.

Jumbo Bananagrams is a giant version of the original international word game phenomenon, while Jumbo ZIP-IT is a large-scale edition of the fast-paced

two-player word race, that can be played in as little as 20 seconds. Both have been recognised and highly rated by the Good Toy Guide.

Jumbo Bananagrams (£49.99) features 144 waterproof, three-inch square tiles packaged in a funky giant yellow banana-shaped tote bag. Requiring no pencil, paper or board, Jumbo Bananagrams is addictive fun and educational play for kids aged five to 105, at home or on the go. Players race against each other to build giant crossword grids and use all their letter tiles.

Jumbo ZIP-IT (£49.99) is an exhilarating high-speed

crossword race featuring 24 wooden lettered, two-inch cubes and coloured scoring zips that come built into the pouch. To play, each person takes 12 cubes and races to form their own crossword grid using any side of the cubes. The first player to use all their own cubes calls 'ZIP!' and marks a point by moving his/her own zip up the pouch. The first person to score ten points calls 'ZIP-IT!' and wins the game.

Liven up any family barbecue, day trip to the seaside or even sunny beer-garden lunch with these giant outdoor word games from Bananagrams. **020 7298 9500**



JNH

Over the past year, JNH has made a name for itself in the Disney licensed children's furniture category. Indeed, the firm says that its quality products have taken the market by storm.

JNH is expecting its swinging hammock to be a firm favourite with children this summer. It has already been produced in Disney *Frozen* and *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* designs, both of which have been well received. The hammock is made of powder coated metal and rot resistant polyester, and has a 50kg child limit.

Further items in the JNH portfolio include patio and camping chairs, plus the patio chair and parasol sets and the moon chair.

Other best sellers include the flip out foam sofa, plus the wood and plastic table and chair sets which have been produced in a range of licences. These include Disney *Frozen* and Mickey Mouse among others.

For 2015, the firm has added *Star Wars*, *The Avengers* and *Spider-Man*, and will be launching new indoor and outdoor products to capture children's imaginations. **0161 737 1881**



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MGA
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SAMBRO

Sambro has extended its licensed collections to include some exciting new outdoor lines for spring/summer 2015. The new *Paw Patrol* range will include several outdoor products perfect for toddlers: cute ride-ons, scooters, roller skates and safety pads. Each product features popular *Paw Patrol* characters and decals and are a must-have for fans of the popular programme.

The outdoor ranges also include scooters, ride-ons and skateboards in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Spongebob Squarepants* licences. The high-quality lines complement the comprehensive cross-category licensed ranges offered by the company.

Sambro also offers a wide range of outdoor pocket money lines across its *Disney Princess* licences. *Frozen* continues to be one of the hottest licences

around and *Frozen* Skipping Ropes, bubble wands, bowling sets are brilliant impulse price points. The *Avengers Assemble* range also includes cool bubble wands so boys don't miss out on the action.

"Licensed outdoor products are crucially important as they allow retailers to sell across many categories, enabling them to capitalise at more key selling points throughout the year," Nikki Samuels, director at Sambro, explains.

"You can never really rely on the British weather and our outdoor lines can be played with all year round outdoors ... if you wrap up warm. Joking aside, in general, sales seem to be spread across the year as high price point outdoor items such as trampolines, swings, and so on, are bought for both birthdays and Christmas."

0845 873 9380



Nikki Samuels,
Director,
Sambro

"Traditional outdoor lines remain the most popular, so standing out from the crowd is key to success."



HASBRO

The Super Soaker Floodfire water blaster can give you the ultimate tactical advantage in almost any water battle. Make refilling your blaster a thing of the past; the Floodfire blaster quickly and easily connects to your garden hose for unlimited soakage.

The moment you disconnect it from the hose, the Floodfire becomes a pump-to-fire blaster with a hefty 1.27 litre capacity tank. Seek out and soak your friends, then refill or reattach your hose when the tank runs low and

keep the Floodfire blaster soaking. The Floodfire blaster soaks targets up to an impressive 38 feet (11.5 metres) away. Whether connected to a hose for non-stop soakage or detached for a mobile attack, the Floodfire blaster gives you all the waterpower you need to keep the competition drenched this season.

020 8569 1234



JUMBO GAMES

Jumbo Games has launched a fantastic range of Giant Foam Floor puzzles.

Made from durable foam, the puzzles are easy to assemble giant tiles, which can all be joined together to create a super-sized play mat of every youngsters' favourite characters.

Jumbo believes that they are perfect for outdoor play due to the durability of the

foam and can be wiped clean from messy play.

2015 will see the firm add *Peppa Pig* to the collection,

with *Sophia the First* and *Frozen* launching later on this year.

01707 289 289



VTECH

This year VTech is launching its brand new Kidzroom Action Cam, the perfect toy to enjoy outside, according to the firm.

The Kidzroom Action Cam (5+ years, £49.99) allows children to take photos and videos on the go and comes complete with a waterproof case and mounts for bikes and skateboards. Whether you are planning a trip to the park on your bike or a summer holiday by the pool, the Action Cam provides great fun for your children who can add photo effects to their images and create stop motion videos. It will be a must have toy for any outdoor activity.

VTech is also launching an updated version of its popular Kidzroom Smartwatch. Launching later this year, the Kidzroom Smartwatch (5-12 years, £39.99) is a must have gadget. With the addition of three new colours (light blue, green and purple) to the existing range, the 8-in-1 watch will provide children with hours of

entertainment from taking photos, videos and voice recordings to playing a range of games.

A great addition to the wearable technology category, this clever device is easy to use and the perfect fit for your children's wrist. With a 128MB internal memory, each Smartwatch can store around 900 photos or 15 minutes of video, perfect for capturing those outdoor moments making it the must have 'on the go' accessory this year.

01235 555 545





Roadster Venture

Battery and charger included with forward and reverse gears

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For more Feber items Contact: famosauk famosa.es 01623 237 433 www.famosagroup.com

Famosa

FEBER



Michelle Lilley,
Marketing Manager,
Little Tikes

LITTLE TIKES

2015 is set to be another strong year for Little Tikes, with the firm highlighting three new launches.

First up, the Cape Cottage Playhouse (£99.99) is for ages two and above and offers a perfect play home for any child who enjoys a spot of role-play. The cottage features a mailbox, two Dutch doors and working window shutters. It also comes in red, tan and pink. The new launch completes the wide range of playhouses in the Little Tikes collection.

Moving on, and the Sizzle n' Serve Grill allows children from 18 months to garden role-play like their parents. Arriving in spring, the Sizzle n' Serve Grill comes in cool colours and styling, plus numerous accessories to make BBQ role-play fun.

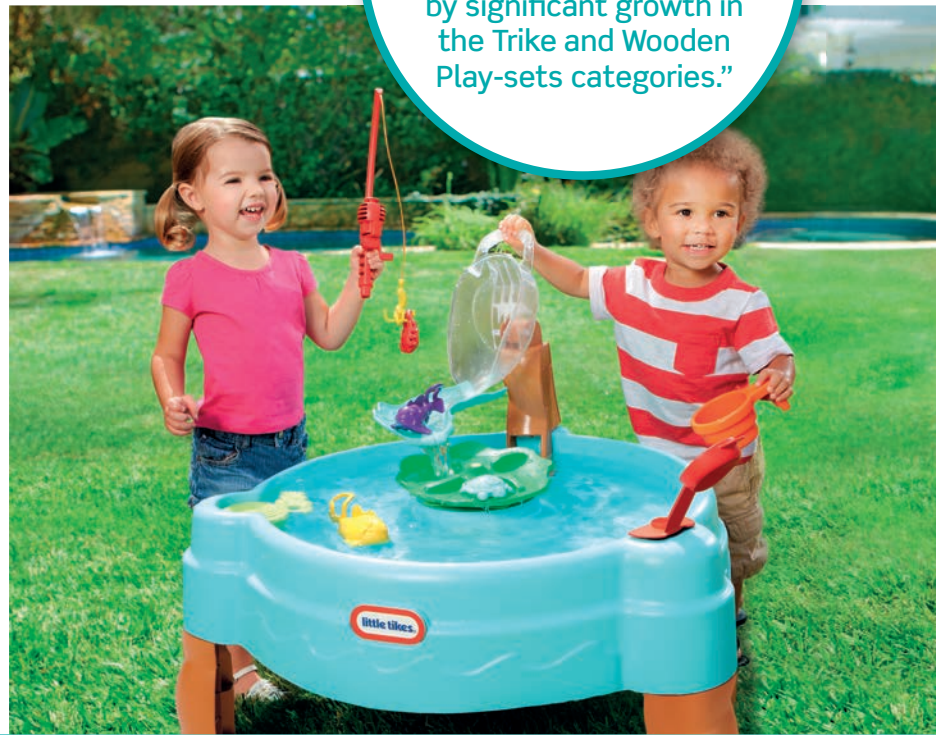
Little Tikes will also be concentrating on the Fish n' Splash Water Table (£49.99), aimed at ages two

and above. Children can learn to fish using their own fishing rods and scoops. Little fishermen will be able to add their latest catch to the fish bowl ready to be counted, then watch it come splashing back down ready to be caught again. The product comes with ten accessories, to allow children to have endless fun catching, counting, pouring and splashing in their own back garden.

"2014 was an extremely positive year for Little Tikes having a strong mix of new lines across core categories such as Trikes, Wooden Play-sets and additions to our iconic Cozy Coupe family," says Michelle Lilley, Little Tikes' marketing manager. "We have seen significant growth in the outdoor space – this was helped by the great weather we had over the summer period.

"With new brand launches and strong additions to our

existing portfolio, we are confident 2015 will continue to see us grow from strength to strength."
01908 268 480



"The drive to getting children outdoors and active continues to be key and this is supported by significant growth in the Trike and Wooden Play-sets categories."

MATTEL

BOOMco continues to bring the next generation in adrenaline-fuelled fun to the outdoor market with a range of amped up blasters, darts, shields and targets

built for maximum distance and speed.

Spring/summer sees the continuation of the popular Twisted Spinner, which features a rotating barrel

that spins 310 degrees with every dart fired. Children can launch eight darts in rapid succession up to 70 feet in the air. With Smart Stick technology, you can see exactly where you nailed it, as the tip of every dart sticks to the shields and sticky targets only.

New launches for S/S include the Railstinger, which blasts up to 60 feet with two modes of play, and the Slamblast. Also continuing this year are the Dual Defenders, Whipblast, Farshot and Clipfire.

01628 500000



TOMY

New this year in the John Deere collection are the Monster Trucks Pullbacks – suitable for ages three and above and priced at £4.99 for a selection of three.

Combining monster truck styling with the reputation of John Deere, the Monster Treads Mini Pullbacks are made from sturdy plastic and feature the trademark tyres for off-road action.

Children can choose from a tractor, dump truck or gator, each with a unique moving implement.

Also from John Deere is the Mini Sandbox and Dump Truck set (£9.99). The tractor includes a working front loader, while the dump truck can carry large loads.

Both vehicles have free-rolling wheels, made to last.
0208 722 7300



HY-PRO

New for 2015 is the Zinc Flyte case scooter, which is being pitched by the firm as every child's ultimate travel companion this season.

Encouraging children to be active and play outside is Zinc's mission and, with many years of success in the wheeled category, the firm has developed a solution to make travel fun for kids.

With worldwide design rights and patents, the colourful and vibrant case scooter is made with a unique material which makes the scooter impact resistant, easy to clean and splash proof.

Suitable for ages four and above, the firm believes that the three wheeled 'rock n roll style' scooter is sure to be a blast with kids while on their travels. Due to being lightweight and a compact size, it is perfect for cabin

luggage, family holidays, sleepovers, trips away or simply picnics in the park.

The Zinc Flyte case scooter will be fully supported with a heavyweight marketing campaign in 2015 to raise awareness with consumers.
01582 670100





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*Source: NPD EPOs sales Jan-Dec 2014 £ value
**Source: EPOs sales data January 2015



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MV SPORTS

Following a successful 2014, MV Sports continues to lead the market in licensed and own brand wheeled toys.

This year MV's portfolio of sector leading licences is further strengthened with the addition of several highly anticipated new properties including a multi property agreement with The Walt Disney Company. The new Disney line-up features *Disney Princess*, *Disney Cars* and *Disney Planes*, as well as *The Avengers* and *Star Wars* which are both gearing up for huge film releases in the coming year.

Disney Princess has time and again proven itself as a must-have licence in the girls' pre-school market. The innovative new range combines added value magical accessories with enchanting colourways and striking graphics.

For younger boys, the *Disney Cars* range revs into life with Lightning McQueen character features. The collection offers everything from scooters to bikes and helmets to skateboards.

As dominant as ever are *Peppa Pig* and Thomas leading the way in the pre-school market. Both continue to grow and this year had their ranges boosted with innovative products such as the Sit 'n' Scoot, which converts from ride-on to scooter at the press of a button and Scoot Cases, travel cases with flip down scooter attachment.

For older boys, trusted favorites such as Batman and *Star Wars* storm ahead. New licences are under development for *Thunderbirds* and *World of Warriors*.

MV's Stormtrooper inspired range of Star Wars skateboards, scooters, bikes and helmets offers an exciting option for retailers in advance of the launch of *Episode VII* later this year.

Marvel's Avengers promises to be the

superhero hit of the spring/summer cinema season with *Age of Ultron* due for release in April.

MV's own wheeled range has attracted a lot of attention throughout last year and into 2015. The Grow & Go range offers a combination of convertibility and re-configuration which allows each product to adapt to the child's needs.

The range of Kickmaster balls, goals and more combines design and quality materials.

MV's outdoor play range, Hedstrom is known for its quality, and for older children, the Stunted range of extreme scooters has been enhanced with the XTS and XTC top spec scooters and new Voodoo Dirt Scooter for off road.

0121 748 8000



VIVID

After a year of strong sales, Phlat Ball is a proven winner in the outdoor category.

2015 sees the launch of the Phlat Ball Jr. Neon (£4.99) available in three

bright colours: neon pink, orange and green. The range will also include the Phlat Ball V3 (£9.99) in red, yellow and purple.

What looks like a bubble, but plays like a ball? It's the amazing Wubble Bubble Ball, and it's super stretchy, squishy and so lightweight that you can kick-it, throw-it and even whack-it. Wubble will be available with a pump (£19.99) in blue and pink, as well as without (£9.99) in blue and purple.

The brand will be heavily supported throughout 2015 with

marketing and PR activity from launch. Wubble was also voted best new toy in the outdoor category at London Toy Fair.

Elsewhere, the lightweight Aero Force Sky Riders (£9.99) come with precision wings, designed to maximise flight times. Each glider comes with a launcher to help achieve amazing flight times. With no assembly or batteries required you can fly straightaway. Available in six cool wing designs, Aero Force will be TV advertised.

01483 449944



GOLDEN BEAR

The company's My First JCB range is a kid tough pre-school brand based on real life JCB vehicles.

New for autumn/winter is My First JCB Build and Go Digger Joey. Designed for kids as young as two, the Build & Go Digger includes a cab, screwdriver, four super-sized wheels and front scoop. Budding engineers can attach the wheels and front scoop to the cab and the digger can be assembled over and over again for lots of

construction fun. The screwdriver stores away at the back of the cab when not in use.

Meanwhile, the My First JCB Fun Farm Tractor Tim encourages imaginative play and features a trailer with detachable tailgate. Fun Farm Tractor Tim has chunky wheels, ideal for indoor or outdoor play.

The My First JCB Big Wheeler Freddie features a fun plough, perfect for raking sand or soil folds up when not in use.



Finally, RC Doug Dumptruck is a remote control vehicle suitable for youngsters. Doug features five phrases, flashing lights and forwards, backwards and turning movements. He comes complete with a manual tipping bucket.

01952 608308

LEAPFROG

LeapBand, the first ever wearable activity tracker for children, encourages active play and healthy habits as little ones play and move with the help of a virtual pet. 'Jumping like a kangaroo' or 'wriggling like a worm' are just some of the fun physical activities children can enjoy in the garden while they are wearing their LeapBand.

LeapBand is perfect for integrating activity and comprehension while running around outside. Along with the pre-loaded challenges, parents are able to set up 36 additional free challenges such as 'pretend to move like a train' via LeapFrog Connect, ensuring children never get bored this season.

Children can also play on-screen games such as Pet Chef and Pet Parlour and earn energy points to help them move up through the levels and receive rewards for their pet.

LeapBand has been designed in conjunction with LeapFrog's in-house team of educational experts and tested with families throughout its development. High-tech features on the

device include a built-in accelerometer, high-resolution colour screen, rechargeable battery and splash-proof design.

Doubling up as both an analogue and digital watch, parents are also able to set school and night time modes through LeapFrog Connect, to select days and times during the week where LeapBand will work as a clock only, but continue to track and reward activity.

Supported by Olympians Beth Tweddle and Greg Rutherford, LeapBand has been certified for great outdoor play that is perfect for active children.

01895 202840



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Its radical design lets riders steer using bodyweight. A hit with fans of scooters, boards and bikes.

Has won numerous parenting awards including Best in Play and Product of the year 2014 and was a phenomenal success at Toy Fair 2015

"Completely Addictive!" - GQ Magazine

"Toppled the Razor" - Popular Science

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P20

for ages 7 - adult

RRP £159.95



Japes on a plane

On the move? Long drive ahead? Ten hours on a plane shaping up to be a nightmare? Fortunately, for parents and kids alike, the following firms have travel toy offerings aplenty. **Billy Langsworthy** takes a look

RAINBOW DESIGNS

Rainbow Designs has lots of on the go fun with its *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* line.

The Caterpillar Ring Rattle and Let's Count On the Go Book both come with an attachable loop that attaches easily onto a pram, cot or car seat and provides little ones with visual and sensory stimulation.

The firm's Developmental Caterpillar and Jiggle Caterpillar both come with activities designed to stimulate a child's key senses with crinkles, rattles, squeakers and multiple textures.

Rainbow's *Peppa Pig* Collection also features some travel extensions. The *Peppa Pig* Teether is made from baby soft plush and has three rubber textured teethers to help soothe baby's gums. It also boasts an attachable loop that can

be secured to pushchairs and car seats.

The Peppa & George Pig Musical Pulldown Toys each play a soothing lullaby and can be attached to a pram or car seat and offer a perfect solution to help soothe a

baby to sleep while out and about or on long car journeys.

The firm's Guess How Much I Love you collection includes an activity spiral and attachable pram toys, while its Peter Rabbit collection features Peter Rabbit and Flopsy Bunny pram toys, and a large Musical Peter Rabbit with soothing lullaby.

All can be easily attached to prams and car seats for a range of easy on the go entertainment.

01329 227300



GOLDEN BEAR

For *In the Night Garden* fun on the move, Golden Bear's Activity Igglepiggle is the perfect companion for little ones.

Featuring soft tactile fabrics, stretchy arms and floppy legs, Igglepiggle also holds his favourite red blanket with crinkle and ribbon tags around the edge.

A handy hanging strap makes him a suitable travel companion for buggy or car journeys.

Elsewhere, from Golden Bear's popular *Woolly and Tig* collection is the new Jiggling Woolly.

Made in soft colourful fabrics, children can pull the cord to watch Woolly's colourful legs jiggle and Woolly boasts a clip to allow youngsters to attach him to bags, clothes or to carry around.

Children can also draw their favourite *Peppa Pig*

characters and more with the *Peppa Pig* Mini Sketchy Fun. Kids can draw and then use the swiper to wipe clean and start again.

01952 608308



FLAIR

Flair's Snuggle Pets make great travel companions for long and short trips.

The firm's huggable Seat Pets attach to seatbelts to support kids' for maximum comfort while they sleep on the move.

Seat Pets are available in three animal designs spanning Mercedes the Cat, Lincoln the Lion and Bentley the Dog.

Elsewhere, Tummy Stuffers Wild Ones are four brightly coloured pals that make tidying fun as kids feed them socks, clothes, toys and more.

They can also be used to pack pyjamas and easily convert from a case into a cuddly friend.

Finally, a mix between a snuggly blanket and a cuddly puppet, Flair's CuddleUpPets collection offers children snuggly

companions for those long journeys.

The line-up features characters including a green crocodile, purple bunny, yellow duck, plus pop culture stars like Sulley from *Monsters Inc* and Minnie Mouse.

0208 643 0320



VTECH

VTech has a number of ranges designed to keep little ones entertained while travelling this year.

This spring, VTech is launching its Kidizoom Action Cam which allows children to take photos on the go and comes complete with a waterproof case and mounts for bikes and skateboards.

The Action Cam also allows children to add photo effects to their images and create stop motion videos.

The firm believes the VTech Kidizoom Smartwatch is 'another essential holiday toy this year'.

The 8-in-1 gadget gives kids the chance to take holiday snaps, film their own videos and voice recordings and play built in games while on the road.

The Kidizoom Smartwatch is easy to carry around, easy

to use and with 128MB of storage, children can store around 900 photos or 15 minutes of video.

01235 555545



MATTEL

Mattel offers travel entertainment across several of its top selling brands this year, including Scrabble and UNO.

The firm offers families Travel Scrabble, a travel-sized version of the family favourite, voted one of the top 50 toys of all time in *ToyNews'* poll earlier this year.

The compact, portable game features the classic

playing board with a grid that keeps the tiles in place so it can be taken anywhere and stored easily.

UNO continues to deliver fast-paced, unpredictable fun and is ideal for on the go game play.

A travel-sized range includes the classic UNO Original, as well as the Dare and Junior editions.

01628 500 111



CHARACTER OPTIONS

Character has welcomed a brand new on-the-go drinks bottle to its popular ChillFactor collection.

The ChillFactor Drinks Bottle features an aluminum water bag allowing drinks to be chilled within seconds.

Simply keep the water bag in the freezer, and once frozen, pop it in the bottle and add water, juice or isotonic drink.

The contents will keep chilled for up to two hours and a colour changing feature indicates how chilled a drink is.

Launch plans will target the already proven

ChillFactor fans in the kids and parental markets, plus a strategic campaign that will reach the sports sector, too.

0161 633 9800



HASBRO

Hasbro boasts a wide range of Games on the Go featuring some of its most popular brands.

The travel friendly Monopoly sees players tour the city for properties, sites, stations and utilities while investing in houses and hotels. For an even speedier game, the speed die caters for a quick and intense game of Monopoly.

Games on the Go Battleship features convenient, self-contained storage cases that double as the interlocking game units, so players can open them up and start playing wherever they want.

The Cluedo title in the Games on the Go line features a deck of Intrigue Cards that can help sleuths solve the

crime faster, but could also result in a second victim. When the game is over, players can clip the game units together for easy, on-the-go storage.

Finally, the travel friendly Guess Who? can be played

anywhere or everywhere thanks to portable game units that can be clicked together when players have reached their destination.

020 8569 1234



DKL

DKL distributes Miniland Educational and Munchkin Toys in the UK and both brands offer a selection of travel toys and accessories.

Brand new for 2015 are Miniland's On the Go Travel Games.

The collection of six magnetic games are ideal for children aged three to six years old and their compact size makes them great for travel by car, train, plane or bus.

The six games have been designed to help children develop concentration and boost creativity.

On the Go Travel games are priced at £10 and there are various themes to choose from including Crazy Sudoku, Crazy Zoo and Crazy Faces.

DKL also distributes new travel products from the Munchkin brand. Some of the latest additions to

the brand include DKL's new Day and Night Musical Mirror, the See Saw Pals Mirror and the Magical Firefly Mirror.

The travel mirrors can fix on to car seats and are designed to entertain young children for the duration of long journeys.

The mirrors also help parents to monitor their children in the back seat during journeys.

Each mirror boasts its own special features, like the See Saw Pals Mirror featuring cheerful birds which bounce up and down during a trip.

DKL supports all its ranges with high profile marketing campaigns, which include dedicated planograms, bespoke visual merchandising and extensive social media and PR activity.

01604 678780



MARBEL

Marbel's I Love London Trolley from Pink Poppy is a glamorous travel case for pint sized princesses.

The bag features roller wheels, retractable handle and feet that let the bag stand alone, as well as one large compartment and two side pockets.

The firm states that 'the London theme suits the up and coming fashionistas and the functionality makes it a very useable bag'.

Themed Hape puzzle On the Go is a three-piece peg puzzle for children aged 12

months plus. On the Go is part of a large and varied puzzle range all with colourful and friendly designs.

At the Farm and At the Zoo wooden books are conveniently sized at around 15 to 20 centimetres and are easily packed and stored.

Designed for children from aged ten months plus, the friendly illustrations have been designed to get kids reading on the go.

0845 6000 286



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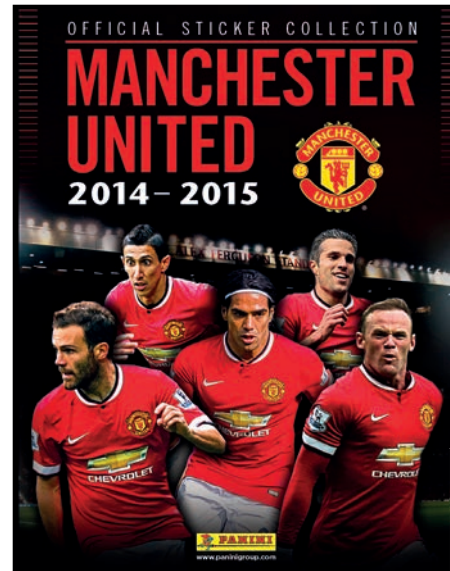
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Master cards

One of the biggest crazes to sweep across school playgrounds each year is trading cards and stickers. **Billy Langsworthy** checks out what looks set to be swapped and stuck throughout this year

TRADING CARDS, playing cards and stickers have been staples of the playground for decades, and the holy trinity of crazes helped drive the industry to its best performance in four years in 2014.

The UK toy market achieved a 4.4 per cent increase in 2014, reaching £3 billion at retail and the list of the top ten best selling new toys included the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil Official Album Stickers from Panini.

While the World Cup dominated the sticker market last year, Pokémon had a great year on the trading cards front.

NPD recorded a 34 per cent upsurge in sales on Pokémon TCG product, with Esdevium's own figures (full year 2013 vs full year 2014) cited as a big contributor to the supplier's overall growth.

"From spring to Christmas 2014, sales were up fuelled by exciting new products, licences and collectables,"



said Frederique Tutt, toys global industry analyst for The NPD Group.

"In 2015, we won't be able to rely on looms nor the World Cup, but thanks to product innovation and a strong line-up of movies including the next

installment of *Jurassic World* and the latest *Star Wars* there will be plenty of excitement for kids big and small throughout the year and we expect the market to increase by three per cent."

And when it comes to this year's biggest movies,

trading cards, stickers and playing cards are all looking to capitalise.

While Disney's *Frozen* is expanding its footprint via photocards, trading cards and sticker collections in 2015, the likes of *Minions*, *Minecraft*, *Avengers* and

Big Hero 6 are also hitting the shelves in card form.

So while we don't have a World Cup this year to drive the sector, the big screen is looking to step into the tournament's rather large shoes to carry this particular baton.

CLICK DISTRIBUTION

Click Distribution is kicking off the month with the launch of its first ever Minecraft Sticker – Card Collection with a price per pack of £1.50.

This month also sees the launch of Match Attax Extra. This features all new cards including all of the latest signings from the January transfer window, such as Wilfred Bony and Juan Cuadrado.

Panini is also releasing the first official Disney Frozen Trading Card Collection, featuring all of the most popular characters from the smash hit film.

Elsewhere, Konami will be launching Yu-Gi-Oh! Premium Gold Series 2, while Topps is releasing the brand new Marvel Avengers Hero

Attax featuring heroes and villains from the popular kids TV animation, *Avengers Assemble*.

Petrol heads are in luck as Top Gear Turbo Attax TCG is back this month, with over 200 cards to collect including a host of cool-looking cars from the leading car manufacturers, 32 mirror foil cards and 16 holographic foils.

Finally, having topped the UK box office, Disney's *Big Hero 6* is making the move into stickers. Panini's Disney Big Hero 6 Sticker Collection and Disney Frozen Photocards both recently launched and according to Click, are performing 'exceeding well at retail'.

01282 862558 /
01604 877888



PANINI

Following on from a record-breaking year, Panini has a launch schedule for 2015 boasting sticker and trading card launches focused on some of the hottest properties around.

The firm's Big Hero 6 Sticker Collection, based on the Oscar-nominated Disney film, will receive significant support through sampling and advertising, while Panini's girls offering kicks off with its Disney Sofia The First sticker collection.

The magazine sells an average of 40,000 copies per issue and is regularly in the top ten pre-school titles. Panini claims: "We know the interactive and immersive nature of the collection will engage with consumers."

The unstoppable force of nature that is Disney's

Frozen looks set to continue to captivate children this year, and Panini has Photocards, Trading Cards and a new sticker collection on the way.

The firm's current sticker collection, Disney Frozen Enchanted Moments, held the number two spot in the NPD charts and staying with Disney, Panini is also launching a sticker collection based on this month's live action *Cinderella* film.

For boys, Panini will be releasing a sticker collection to support *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, as well as a line of football collections set to be backed with expansive press and marketing campaigns.

"Whilst retailers have the momentum of a truly sales defying collection such as the World Cup behind them,

we urge them to utilise the fact that children now view your store as a destination retailer for selling stickers,' read a statement from the company.

"Our research shows that a World Cup collection can boost sales of general collections in the months following, so if you are a retailer that has always stocked a good range of collectables, please take a little time to think about enhancing displays to ensure collections are visible to children.

"If you are a retailer that trialled the World Cup as an exception, we would encourage you to think about stocking a more permanent range of collectables."

01892 500105



ESDEVIVUM

The Pokémon Trading Card Game saw a significant boost to UK sales across 2014 – with a renewed interest in the property at both trade and consumer level.

NPD recorded a 34 per cent upsurge in sales on Pokémon TCG product, with Esdevium's own figures (full year 2013 vs full year 2014) being a big contributor to the supplier's overall growth.

The growth has continued into 2015 with the release of Pokémon TCG: XY – Primal Clash and was also buoyed by the end of year releases of the *Omega Ruby/Alpha Sapphire* video games.

The new video games, historically a huge driver of the TCG, were widely reported to be the biggest-ever UK launch of any Pokémon game, with sales outweighing the release of *Pokémon X* and *Pokémon Y* by 17 per cent.

The new expansion, Pokémon TCG: XY – Primal Clash, brings with it over 150 new cards and 12 new Pokémon-EX cards including colossal new arrivals like Mega Gardevoir-EX and Mega Aggron-EX.

Elsewhere, the Yu-Gi-Oh! trading card game is constantly expanding with the addition of new

cards and characters throughout the year, and 2015 will boast a number of key new releases.

The new booster set – Secrets of Eternity – features highly coveted cards, while the much anticipated Structure Deck Hero Strike brings back the fan-favourite Mighty Hero monsters.

Following on from the success of last year's Premium Gold collection, Konami is excited to launch its successor: Premium Gold 2. Continuing the theme of desirable cards, Premium Gold 2 maintains the popular Gold Secret card, bringing a golden shine to old and new cards alike.

March also sees the release of the Yu-Gi-Oh! The Secret Forces Special Booster and the World Superstars all foil set. Fifty of these cards were previously available only in Japan and Korea, but are now being made available worldwide.

In addition to Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh!, Esdevium also supplies Magic the Gathering, Cardfight!! Vanguard, Future Card Buddyfight, Weiss Schwarz and the My Little Pony collectable card games to the UK toy trade.

01420 59359



HASBRO

Having conquered the box office as the breakout stars of the *Despicable Me* franchise, the Minions are starring in their own movie this summer and Hasbro has a range of cards set to delight fans of the little yellow creatures.

Blending trading cards and card games is the Minions Challenge Card Game. Pitting Minion-against-Minion, each collectable Minion

character comes with five cards and a game guide.

Players can deploy battle cards against opponents and keep playing until their Minion reaches the top of his scorecard first to win.

Hitting shelves from May 1st, there are 32 different characters to collect, battle and trade in the Minions Challenge Card Game collection.

020 8569 1234



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Jon Salisbury

Our star columnist returns, and revisits some of the toy trends from years gone past and how they've fared since

INSPIRATION FOR this column came from the annual announcement of what new words would be included in the Oxford English Dictionary, and that made me think of the process of natural selection that refreshes the toy market every year.

For every Monopoly, Scrabble, Barbie or Meccano from the early to mid 1900s to products like Trivial Pursuit, Sylvanian Families or Transformers from the latter half of the 20th century, there are a myriad of toys that survived for barely more than one Christmas.

if a request for Tekno the Robotic Puppy is impossible to fill. And if the Britney Spears singing doll isn't at nearby stores, perhaps a Christina Aguilera singing doll will fit the bill."

A host of toys have passed under the bridge since then and I didn't stop there.

"Tech toys were outnumbered by more traditional toys, but still make a strong showing on PlayDate's list. The bestseller list includes Playmate's Amazing Babies, a computer chip-enhanced doll that learns to talk and respond to

"It's a wonderful way to get children to focus on their lives, and what is important to them and the times they live in."

Clearly not, though, as I haven't heard hide nor hair of it since then.

I once told *The Guardian*: "The traditional toy industry has got to fight for its share of spend on children. There's a need to redefine what categorises toys." Not unlike now, eh?

Some toys have an amazing shelf life and simply won't disappear.

Just take a look at Furby and Tamagotchi which have each had numerous resurrections and Teletubbies, of course, which is shortly set for relaunch.

It seems that good toys simply refuse to die - or fade away.

"Toys flare, then they die," I was once quoted as saying. "Every toy company is just a stone's throw away from disaster."

To recall some of those products I decided to Google myself to see what toys I've jabbered on about when interviewed by the media as a talking head on the subject.

"Toys flare, then they die," I was once quoted as saying in a book called *The Real Toy Story*. "Every toy company is just a stone's throw away from disaster," I continued in my best harbinger of doom tone.

Can you remember any of these products featured in an article in *The Los Angeles Times* about my PlayDate media show in New York in 2000?

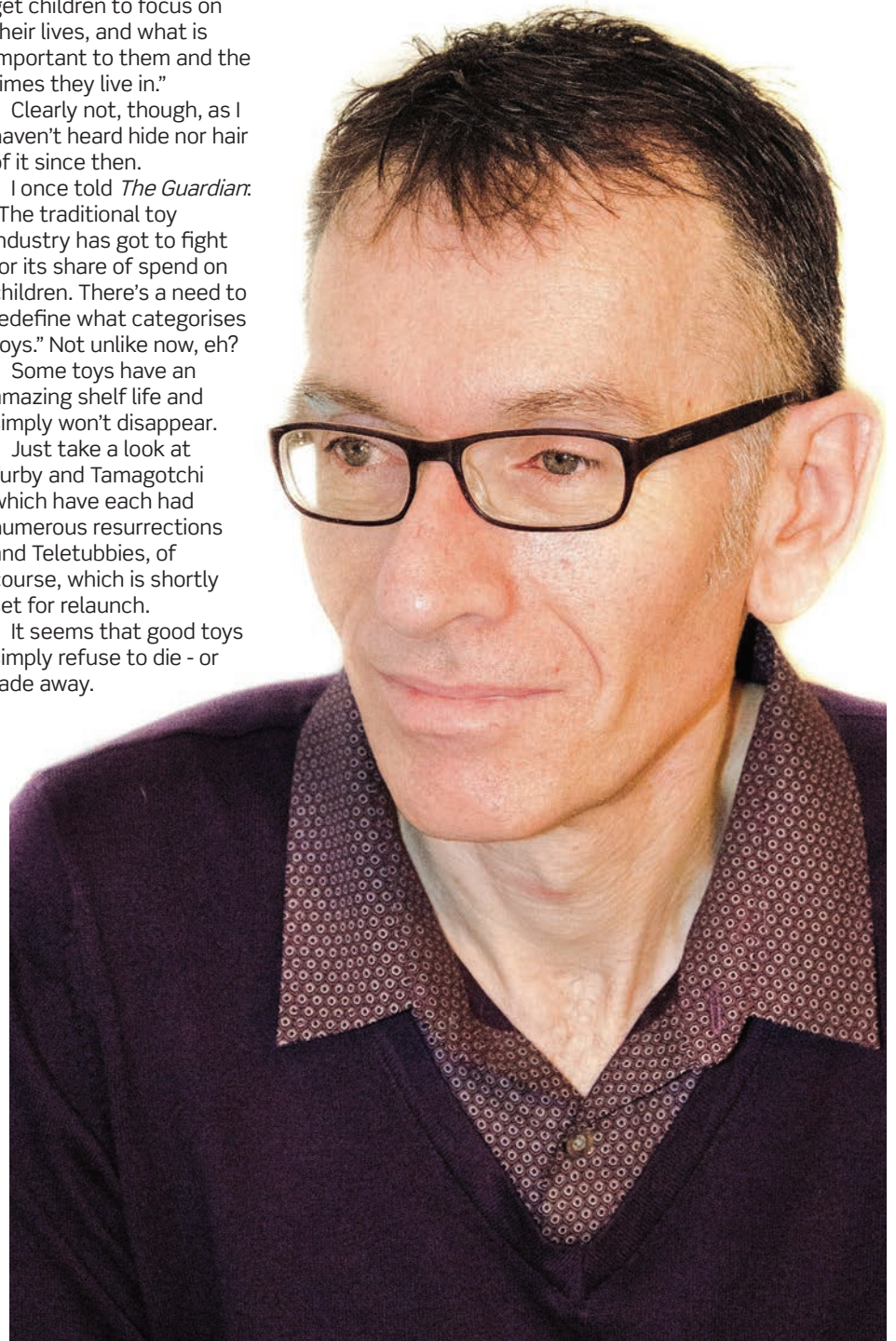
"A Poo-Chi Interactive Puppy from Tiger Electronics might do

its human parent. Amazing Babies also will interact with each other."

Of course, some toys don't just disappear but come crashing down to earth with a bump. One newspaper wanted me to comment on why Hasbro had withdrawn advertising support for *Sindy* in 1997. "She is running so far behind Barbie it is almost a non-issue," I said.

Capsela by IQ Builders was another toy that I highlighted. "One of the most versatile of science toys around," I opined.

How about the Time Capsule Activity Kit? "This would make a great family project for the millennium," I told *The Independent*.



Jon Salisbury has written about the toy business since 1985, editing magazines and running toy media events in New York and London. He can be contacted at jonsalisbury@icloud.com or @JonSalisbury

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ToyNews is published 11 times a year by NewBay Media ~ Saxon House, 6a St. Andrew Street, Hertford, Hertfordshire SG14 1JA Fax: +44 (0)1992 535648

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NewBay Media is a member of the Periodical Publishers Associations



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Average Net Circulation: 6,092 July 2013 to June 2014.

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UK: £50 Europe: £60 Rest of World: £90

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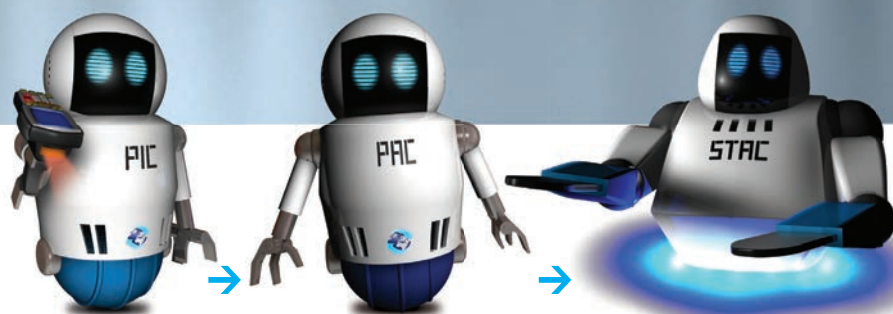
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STAC currently oversees 52,000 pallet locations. His job scope will expand again in Q2-2015, when he opens up phase 1 of the London Gateway operation, adding a port-centric + market-centric dimension to UK retail logistics!

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